DAVE SIM on BWS's OPUS • RICK VEITCH • CEREBUS GALLERY • DREW HAYES
AARDVARK-VANAHEIM/WIN-MILL PRODUCTIONS
FOLLOWING
CEREBUS
#11
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"Writers are God's People"

As we go to press, the Writers Guild of America has called a strike, and news reports are talking about how the late-night talk shows are the first "casualties." You know: Leno, Letterman, O'Brien, Ferguson, Kimmel, Stewart, et al. Their shows are going into reruns immediately. Why? If one is to believe news reports, it's because these brilliant, high-paid comedians suddenly do not have writing staffs to pen all those hilarious witticisms that entertain us so.

For real?

Well, no. The truth is that all of the other people who work on the shows—the casts, the crews, the guy who makes the coffee in the green room—belong to unions who are honoring the Writer's Guild strike. So it's not just the writers who aren't showing up for work; it's everyone. While only the writers are technically on strike, they are getting the support of most everyone else.

It did make me wish, however, for an Alternate Earth scenario. I would have loved to have seen LLOFKS et al. go onstage and wing it. Could they have done it for a month? A week? Even a day without boring audiences to death? In my Earth X imagination:

(1) With at least three days to prepare (by Friday, a strike looked, if not probable, then at least highly possible), could LLOFKS et al. have come up with seven to twelve minutes of *something* to say on Monday night—something that, if not fall-off-your-chair hilarious, would be *at least* entertaining? Apparently we'll never know. My guess is that Ferguson would hardly miss a beat, Leno and Stewart would do well, Letterman okay, followed by all the others. The audience numbers would have probably *increased*, at least initially, if the network's hype machines got into full gear: "See (host) tonight performing without a net!" But even if the other unions would not have honored the WGA strike, it's hard to imagine the networks taking such a risk with this proposal. If the hosts fell flat and the audience saw the truth, they'd be disillusioned forever.

(2) Do the writing staffs also come up with interview questions? You know, the type of in-depth late-night queries such as, "How was your vacation?" "What was it like working with George Clooney?" and "Can you explain this photo of you in *National Enquirer?*" Is this such a specialized skill that the hosts can't wing it? Does the host even know who the guests are each evening? Letterman seems particularly bad about not knowing even the most rudimentary facts about his guests or their work.

Long ago I tossed away the ideal that news anchors had a clue what they were talking about, and of course I've known that talk shows had writers, but I like to think that the most-acclaimed hosts could do a semi-impromptu riff on the days events for, I don't know, maybe five minutes? Jeez, just skimming through the newspaper or online news sites brings plenty of outrageousness and laughs if repeated verbatim. Surely a seasoned pro could toss in a punchline here and there.

But apparently they need writers—lots of them (based on the end credits). Which reminds me of a quote from *MAD* magazine publisher Bill Gaines from an interview years ago. (You wondered if I were ever going to get around to comics in this editorial, didn't you? Yes. And *Cerebus*, too. Patience, grasshopper.) Gaines was asked about the magazine's policy of paying writers the same page rate as artists. (The norm in comics, of course, is to pay artists much more per page than writers.) I don't have the interview in front of me—I don't even remember where I read it, to tell you the truth—but I think I remember the quote fairly accurately. It went something like this: "Writers are God's people. Without writers there would be no novels, no theater, no film, no television."

Comics fans are divided into Art Fans and Story Fans (which includes Character Fans). I was always an Art Fan. If Neal Adams or Michael Golden or Wally Wood or Barry Windsor-Smith (etc.) drew the issue, I wanted it. A good story was an extra bonus, but the art was pre-eminent. Nowadays, after years and years of flipping through issues with Really Nice Art, I've become more demanding. Nice art is still required, but not enough. I want a great story, too. (Like in film: don't tell me about the special effects; what's the story *about?*)

Which is why I love *Cerebus*. Sim and Gerhard's art is some of the best that has ever appeared in comics, but more than that, it wasn't wasted on a frivolous story. Even the comic's detractors would have to admit that. Sim had something to say. He made you think. He made you feel. The series engages readers as no other series has ever done. And that comes as much from the writing as from the art.

I don't know whether the TV writers' complaints toward the industry warrant a strike or not. It's certainly true that writers are often seen as inhabiting the low end of the creative food chain. And news reports state that writers get only about 3 cents for every DVD sold, which doesn't seem right (though in fairness I don't know what anyone *else* is getting for each DVD because of the crappy reporting on this issue). Are the writers being greedy or are they being taken advantage of? I suspect the latter, but that's just a guess.

But I'm inclined at least to agree (not in a strict theological way, but in a more general, uh, "theocreativological" sense) with Bill Gaines:

"Writers are God's people."

—Craig Miller

Following Cerebus

Vol. 1 #11 November 2007

Following Cerebus **produced by**

Craig Miller & Dave Sim

with John Thorne, Blaknite Ludlam, and John Mitchell

Cerebus **comic book by**

Dave Sim & Gerhard

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Rick Veitch Interview

If this is a "Cerebus Dreams" issue of Following Cerebus *(and it may or may not be;* *see page 9**), Rick Veitch is the logical person to be featured in an interview. Not only is he the writer/artist of the dream journal comic* Roarin' Rick's Rare Bit Fiends, *but he (and his comic) makes his way into the* Cerebus *storyline in both* Guys *and* Going Home. *Craig Miller interviewed him by phone on July 31, 2007. The interview was transcribed by Blaknite Ludlam and Craig, and edited by Craig and Rick. Our thanks to Rick for taking the time out for this fascinating discussion.*

Miller: *I'll confess I wasn't too familiar with* Roarin' Rick's Rare Bit Fiends *until recently—it came out at a time when I wasn't paying as much attention to comics as I had in the past. I tracked down the first issue at the local comics shop and found it extremely interesting. Do all the issues follow this format?*

Veitch: Yes. It's essentially a dream journal.

CM: *I gather from this first issue that a lot of cartoonists and cartoonist friends weave their way through your dreams fairly often?*

RV: In the first eight issues I specifically focused on that. I thought it might be a good hook to bring readers in, and I kind of liked the idea of leaving a dream record of a group of artists, as filtered through my unconscious. It's been done in literature by guys like Kerouac and Burroughs; but never in comics, I think.

CM: *I am assuming the rare bit fiend in the title is a reference to the old Winsor McCay strip.*

RV: Yes.

CM: *Have you been a fan of the McCay stuff for a long time?*

RV: Of course. There is no escaping McCay. He's in all of our DNA.

CM: *Everyone knows the* Little Nemo *stuff, but the* Rarebit Fiend *is a little bit harder to track down. I have a book published from Dover from a long, long time ago that collected a lot of it. Have you managed to track down that kind of stuff?*

RV: I'd seen chunks of it over the years but it is only in the last few months that a comprehensive volume has been published. It's called *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend*, and it's by Ulrich Merkal. I believe it contains every dream-themed comic McCay ever did; and there were lots of them. It also explores the cultural impact of the work as well. Terrific book if you can find it.

CM: *Fantagraphics published the large volumes of the Little Nemo collections.*

RV: Yeah, they had some really nice ones.

CM: *Dave included you in* Cerebus *in a couple of different places that I know of off hand. Did you know that was coming, or was it a surprise to you when it hit?*

RV: I ended up lettering those for him, so I saw all the pages in pencil form.

CM: *Oh, okay. The lettering looked like yours, and I thought, oh wow, Dave is really good at mimicking your style!*

RV: Dave is a master letterer who can cop just about anyone. But I think I had the one style he couldn't do! *[Laughter]* The reason was that he wasn't aware of the tool I was using, the FB6 lettering nib. These are cool little lettering pens that flip open for cleaning that I learned to use back at Kubert School. Dave was down at Susan's place in Northhampton not far from my home in Vermont, when he called me up asking me what I lettered with. I said, "Why don't I just come over and letter the thing for you?" The second one, with me and Alan in it, was done by mail. Dave, being the consummate creative professional, always sends me a check whenever he reprints the stuff. I think I'm the only letterer in comics who gets a royalty.

Going Home *(page 150)*

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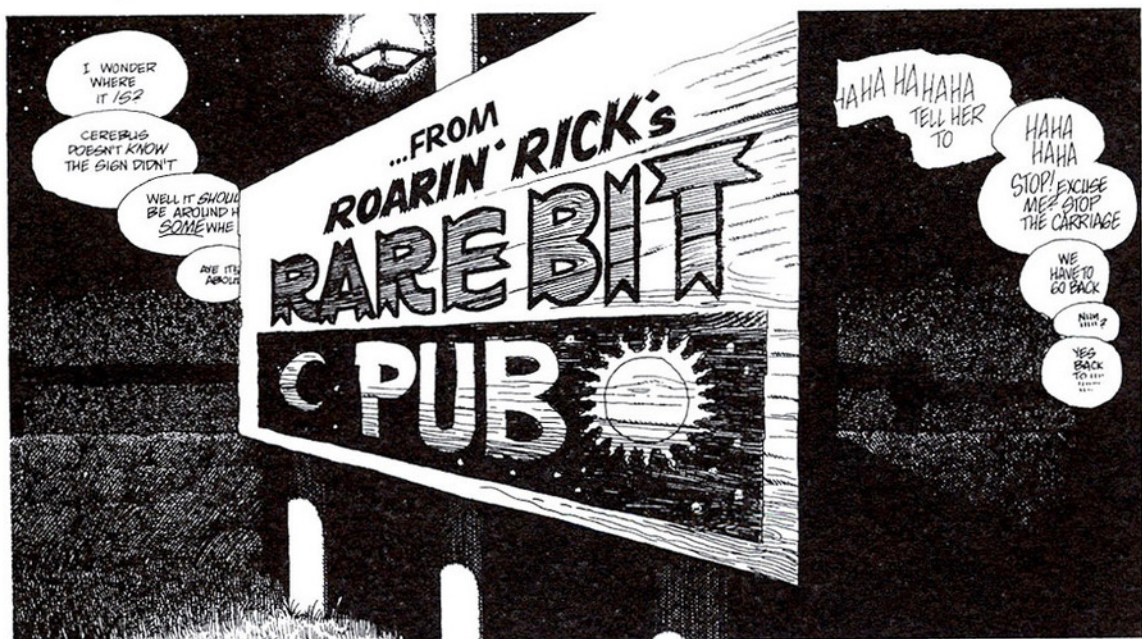
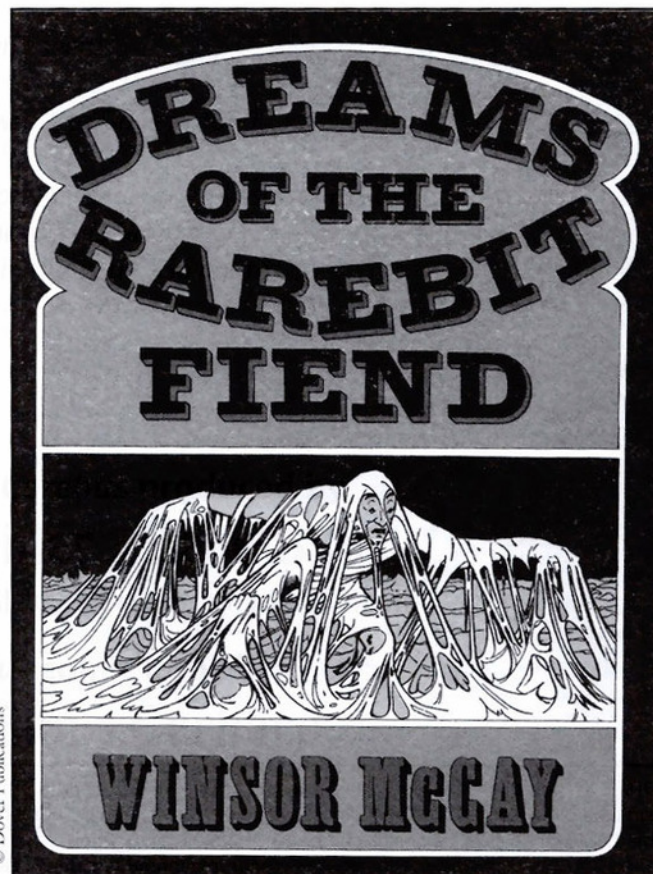
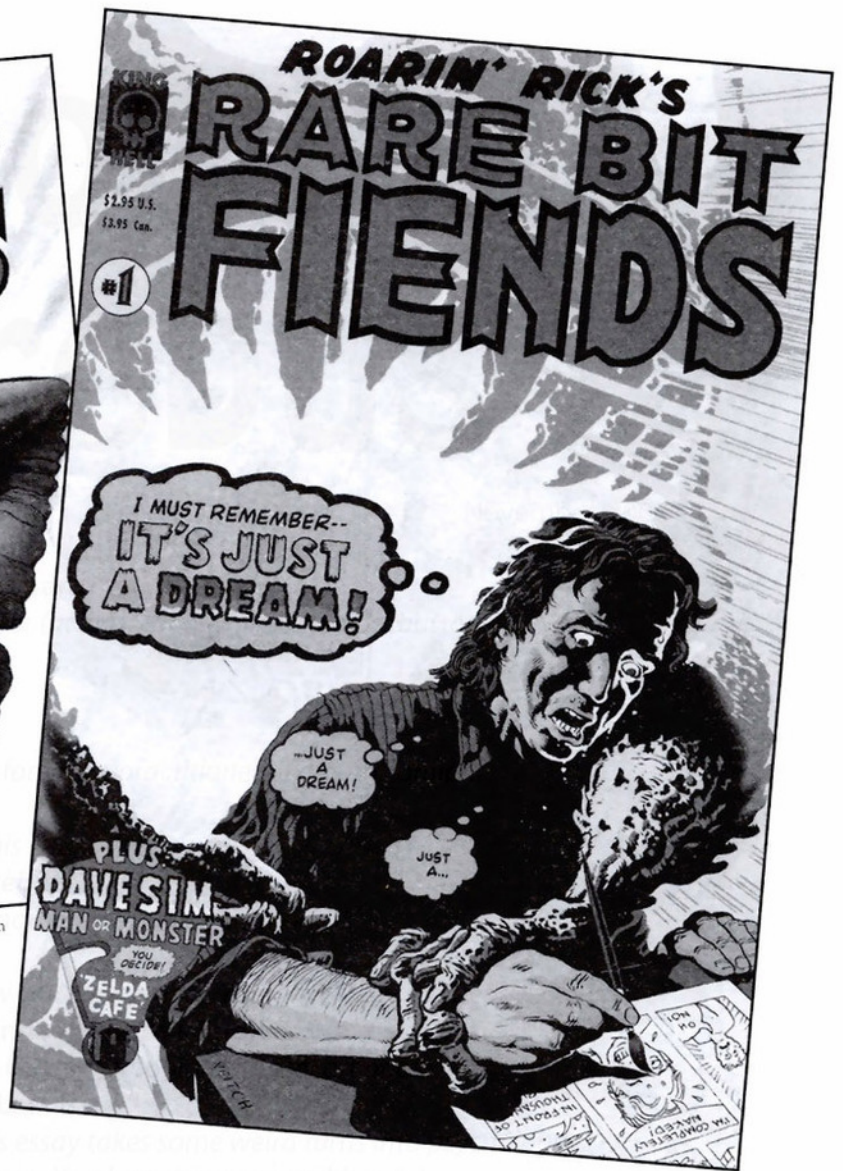
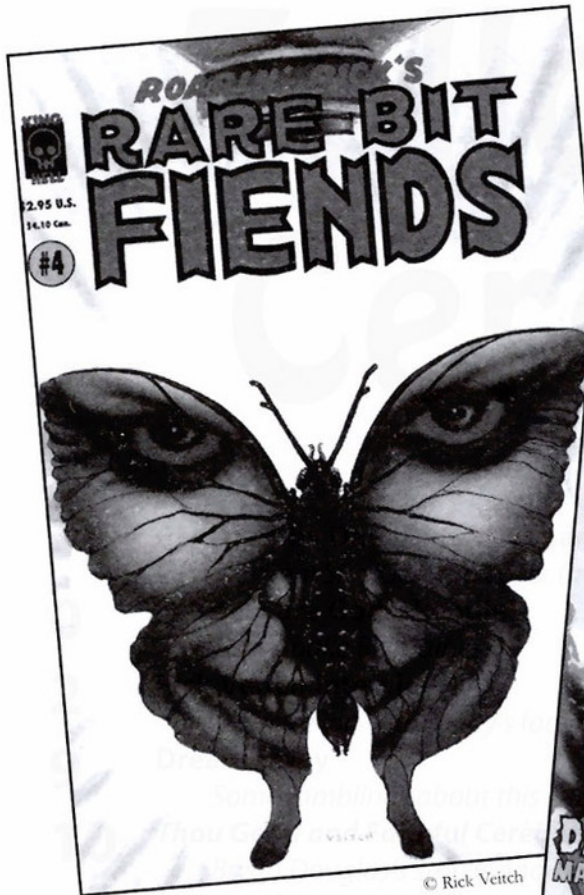
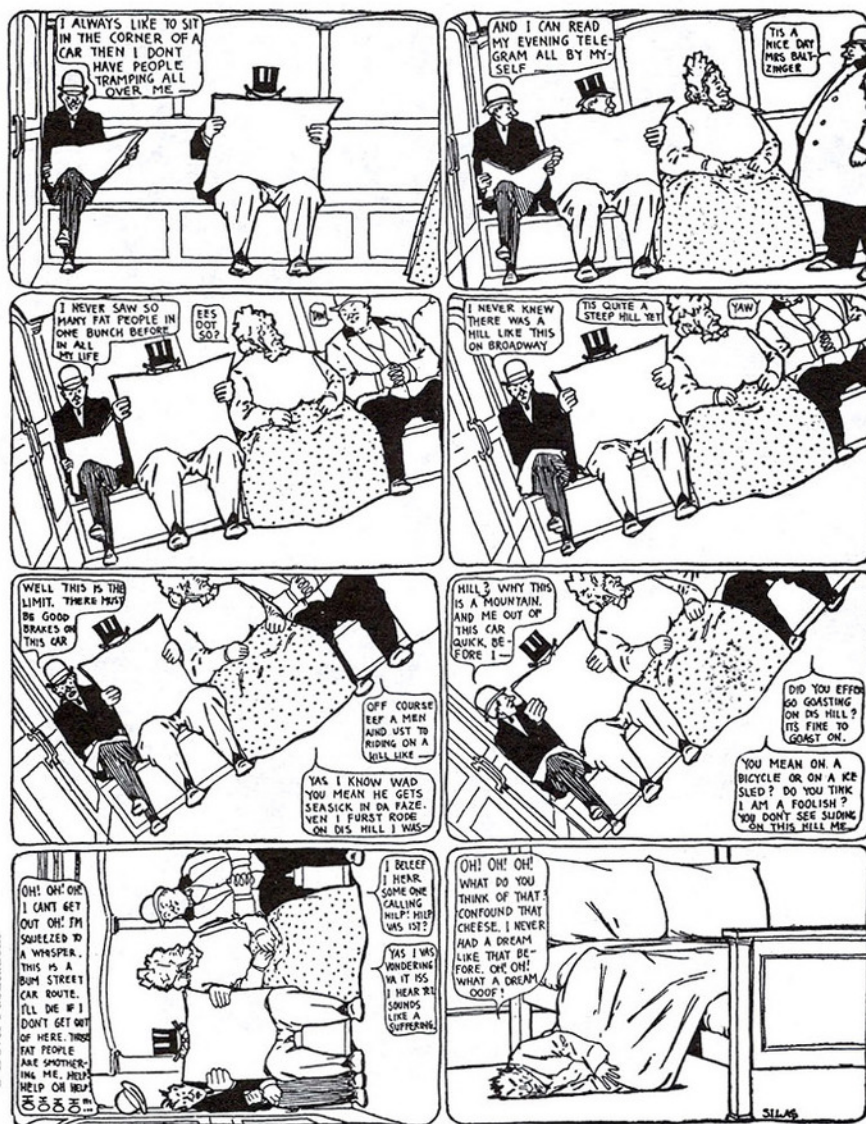

Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend *by Winsor McCay*

CM: *Okay. I'm assuming all of the artwork is his—or did you go in and do some of the inking or something on these? Because it looked fairly close to your style in* Rare Bit.

RV: No no, all the art is him. All I did was the lettering. Gerhard did the backgrounds by grabbing stuff from *Rare Bit Fiends* and working his magic on it. It was pretty awesome looking.

CM: *At the time that you got the pencilled pages, did you know that you were coming up within the storyline, or did all of a sudden Dave just say, "Here it is"?*

RV: Yeah, that part was a surprise.

CM: *Okay. The first chunk is a pretty interesting thing where you've got this whole sequence of dreams versus Bacchus, who thinks that Cerebus is drunk, and so there is that back-and-forth thing, and Dave has you basically expounding on dreams and the meaning of dreams and so forth. Did he get fairly close to your belief in what dreams represent, or were you lettering and going, "Oh wait a minute, this isn't—"*

RV: I think what he was doing in that first one was lampooning my actual language and how I try to explain dreams to people. He was hearing a lot of it because we were doing a lot of shows together.

CM: *Okay.*

RV: I haven't read the comic in a while, but I think he was creating phrases that don't really make sense but sound a lot like I do in real life. He really caught me in that second one. I remember he called me up just to talk to me for a while so he could, you know, satirize my manner of speaking.

CM: *Yeah. There is that thing where Alan will go off on the "Raising of the Bride," and I think your first response was, "Right right right" on everything.*

RV: That's me.

CM: *The basic gist of the idea of dreams as symbols and as representing some sort of unconscious desire or something—is that the kind of thing that you interpret your dreams to be, or are they completely haphazard images?*

RV: Well I've got a personal philosophy about dreaming which I've been evolving since my early twenties. A lot of it is based on my reading of Carl Jung, but I try to read everything I can on the subject. I am organically involved with dreaming on a daily basis, in a much different way than Dave is. I think what Dave did was funny, but I don't think he was trying to put across a cohesive, coherent theory for what dreams are. He was throwing cream pies in those issues.

CM: *Okay. Well then, what was your reaction overall to being in* Cerebus*? Were you worried people were going to completely misinterpret what you were trying to do, or was it nice to have a little additional publicity for your comic, or was it a mixed reaction?*

RV: It's a bit more complex than that, because I had sorta' made Dave one of the characters in my comic. He probably rightly felt a natural inclination to make sport with me because of that. I think he got a kick out of appearing in *Rare Bit Fiends*, and I definitely got a kick out of being in *Cerebus*. But he is such a master at satire, it can be a two-edged sword. At first I'm like, "Oh wow, I get to be in *Cerebus*," and then he's got me sucking a giant elephant cock.

CM: *How did he end up in the first issue of* Rare Bit*? Did you approach him, or did he say, "Hey, I got an idea"?*

RV: At that point, he had been after me for probably a decade to self-publish. When I finally launched *Rare Bit Fiends*, he and Gerhard were coaching me on that initial learning curve. So we were in touch a lot, and we were doing a lot of shows together, and partying. We'd get on the phone and debate feminism now and then. He began appearing in my dreams so much I started calling him "Dave Symbol."

CM: *In the previous issue I interviewed Dave about how*

Above and below: pages from Guys

ing to get a handle on what they mean to you personally. You can go back through world history and find that these same symbols appear in all religion, art and culture. They are universal in that sense and their collective meaning is as important as what they mean to us in our personal lives. But in our personal lives, if you work to engage the Self on its own terms, the dialogue can get really interesting. I can't speak for Dave of course, but I doubt he agrees with any of that.

CM: *We didn't get into it quite to that specificity, but I gathered he is at least suspicious of it—"skeptical" would probably be the best word for it.*

RV: Most people are. Science currently teaches that dreaming is just random firing of neurons.

CM: *One of the things that seems to have popped up especially in the filmmakers I have studied recently over the past ten to fifteen years—the work of David Lynch and some of the Kubrick stuff, particularly* Eyes Wide Shut, *and Peter Weir's* Picnic at Hanging Rock *and* The Last Wave, *is sort of a merging of the dreamworld and the waking world and to some extent a little bit of blurring of those lines, and one of the things I have noticed in* Cerebus *was there is no such blurring. You know pretty whether the dreams in* Cerebus *reflected his own beliefs, and one of the things that came out was his conclusion that as far as he could tell, we don't really know how or why we pick the dreams we do, and that it is a little bit dangerous to analyze too much into the meanings of them. I gather that you have come to a different conclusion. Or do you think that what happens is arbitrary but that we can then conclude from that arbitrariness some ideas about what is going on in the unconscious? How do you put that together?*

RV: The Rick Veitch theory of how dreaming works is pretty much the Jungian theory. Jung mapped out a structure to the psyche that includes what he called the Self, but which is essentially the soul. Dreaming is seen as a natural dialogue between the part of us that lives in the physical world, and the part that exists outside time and space. *[Laughter]* The Self speaks in its own language of symbols, and if we learn that language we can begin to glean some really interesting information. Symbols don't have a single definition like words do. They are packed with layers of meaning. Working with dreams means researching the symbols that appear and intuitively try-

Pages from Guys *(above) and* Going Home *(below)*

RV: Well, comics are dreamlike, so it's only natural to merge actual dreams with comics. Just reading an issue of *Fantastic Four*, you're in the middle of total dream logic. *[Laughter]*

CM: [Laughter] *Well, there's a "comic book logic" that you have to go along with—of course, that's usually used as a pejorative.*

RV: Comics operate on a fairy tale level. They exist in exactly same mental space that the old fairy tales did in the 1600s and 1700s. But now it's Wolverine and Spider-Man and stuff.

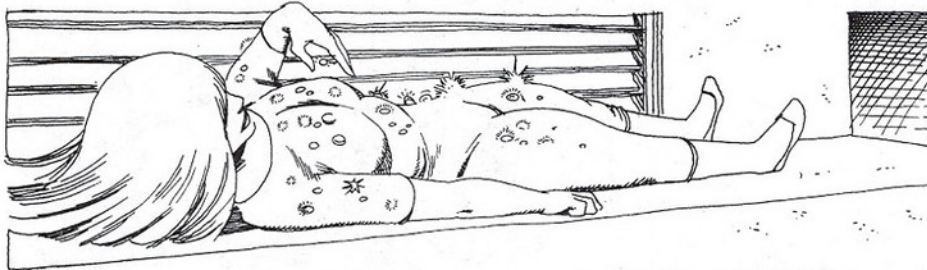
CM: *Do you see any overall theme or process by which dreams are used in comics? When I started thinking about it, I was surprised how often dreams have been used. There's* Little Nemo, *of course, but even things like the weird Steve Ditko Dr. Strange stuff, which is very dream-like (although a lot of times they're not specifically dreams)—the more I thought about it, the more I realized just how many times dreams had been used. There's a great issue of* Swamp Thing *that Alan Moore wrote. "A Dream of Flying" began his Miracleman revival. Neil Gaiman's* Sandman, *of course.*

RV: I see a difference between using dreams in fantasy and making art from dreams. And there has been a lot more

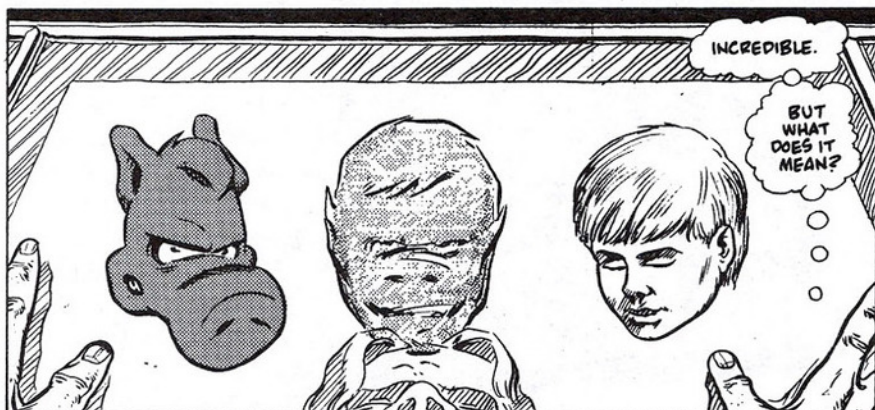
much by the end of the sequence, yes this was a dream. There are two distinctive worlds, and Dave is suspicious of the blurring of those lines—he says it is an interesting theory, but it leads in kind of a dangerous direction. Do you find any sort of interest in that kind of theory of the blurring, or are they pretty distinct worlds in your mind?

RV: I think its interesting, that the two realms are so distinct. While sleeping we exist in this whole other realm that operates with its own visual language. That's a pretty amazing thing when you stop to think about it. Merging and blurring them in art, or in popular culture I think, mimics a state of mind that we probably all experience one or two times in our lives, where you wake up in a dream and you think it's real, or when something weird happens to you in real life and you think for a second, "Am I dreaming?"

CM: *There are a lot of comparisons between comics and film, but they have many important differences and are fairly distinct the way we approach them. Lynch compares watching a film in a dark theater to entering a dream. Some people can see a little bit of that effect when reading a comic. Do you think at all about that kind of process when you're working on a comic?*

There's a woman lying on the loading dock, covering herself with adhesive rhinestones and glitter. She's wearing a flesh-coloured body stocking.

A female tourist is telling this little guy how much she's enjoyed his plays. 'I think he's supposed to be Tennessee Williams but he doesn't really look a bit like him.

Above: panels from Sim's contribution to Roarin' Rick's Rare Bit Fiends *1.*

Right: Veitch page from the same issue.

of the latter in comics than you'd think. Jack Kirby and Joe Simon had a comic called *Your Dreams*, where people would send in their dreams, and Jack would draw them.

CM: *Really! I'd never heard of that one.*

RV: There were only four or five issues that came out. It was amazing. It had a psychoanalyst introduce the dreams and talk about what they meant. A couple years ago the Amadora BD festival in Portugal put on a show of dream comic art, which Dave contributed to. They put out a catalog that turned up dozens of dream comics and dream strips, especially in the very early days, probably inspired by McCay's success. There were a lot of people doing dream half-pagers and stuff in the daily and Sunday papers. It's one of the authentic genres of comics—although no one's ever going to make money on dream comics! *[Laughter]*

CM: *If there hadn't been the success of* Little Nemo *early on, do you think that dreams and comics were just inevitable to have happened at some point, or was it just a quirk of the early success?*

RV: Hard to say. *Little Nemo* definitely influenced everything, so if there had been no McCay—. I think others would have gotten around to it. It's just such a natural. As an artist, I can tell you, when you start doing it, making comics from your dreams is an amazing creative experience. They go together like peanut butter and jelly. *[Laughter]*

CM: *Dreams are so prevalent in comics and films and literature, that they seem a natural component of creativity and the arts.*

RV: Inevitable in the sense that we all dream. There you go. They're as much a part of life as anything else.

Above: Shiny Beasts. *Below:* Abraxas and the Earthman.

CM: *The* Rare Bit *is done, right?*

RV: Actually, no. I've got two chapters done of the next graphic novel, *Subtleman.* This one focuses on shamanic dreams that I have had.

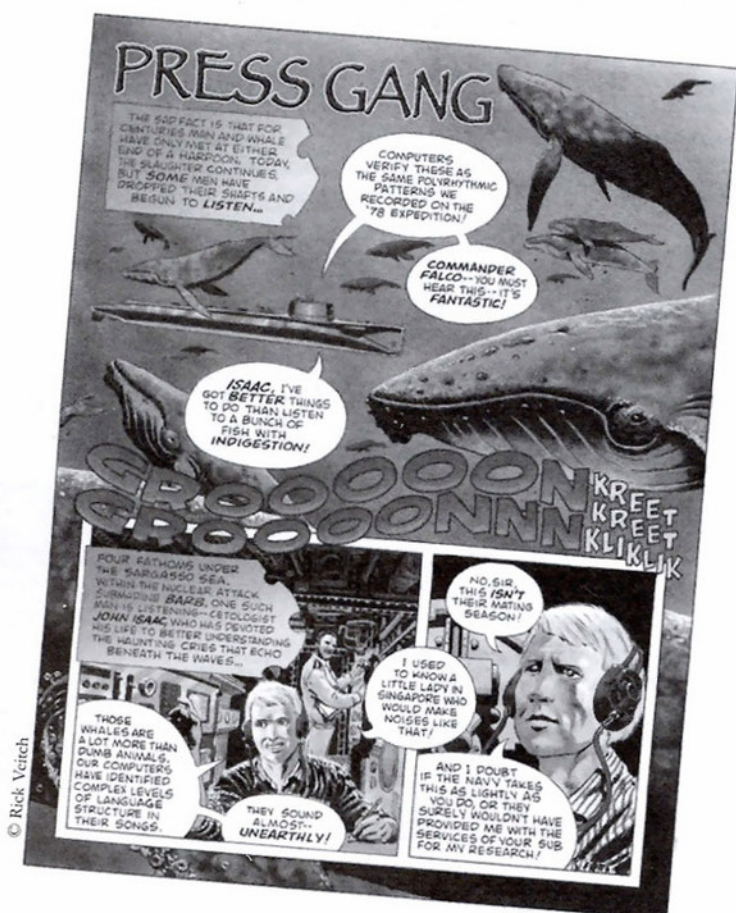
CM: *When will this be out?*

RV: I have no idea. *[Laughter]* It's really hard to sell a dream comic because it's an art thing more than an entertainment thing. So for me it's having the time to work on something that doesn't have to bring in money, and at the moment I'm just not in that position. Maybe once I get that McArthur Grant...

CM: *So what are your current projects?*

RV: I'm doing a monthly book for Vertigo called *Amy@Love.* The first trade for that has just been released. Vertigo also published an original graphic novel called *Can't Get No.* I just finished a nature comic strip for WNET, Channel 13 in New York. And King Hell continues to publish collections of my work with eight titles in the backlist. I've spent the last couple years focusing on reprinting the painted color material I did for *Epic Illustrated* back in the day. My first graphic novel, *Abraxas and the Earthman,* came out in 2006 and *Shiny Beasts*, which collected my Epic short stories, was in 2007. Next year I'll be doing a new reissue of my 1984 Marvel graphic novel, *Heartburst.* Then I'm planning a collection of my underground stuff after that.

CM: *Those were all the questions that I had. Is there anything that needs to be a part of this conversation that I missed?*

RV: No, no, I think we got it covered.

Dream Away

It seemed like such a good idea at the time (that time being during the preparation of *Following Cerebus* 8 way back in early 2006): take an issue and examine the Mind Games/Cerebus Dreams stories in *Cerebus*.

Soon, it became clear that there was way too much to cover in a single issue. And besides, Dave noted that he saw those stories as separate and distinct, not two-of-a-kind. So it made for a simple split: the Mind Games would go in one issue, and the Cerebus Dreams in the next.

Except that the Neal Adams mega-issue would come in-between the two, which would be a nice break to avoid too much similar thematic material (for those who still saw the Mind Games and Cerebus Dreams as "similar").

Except that, after an unfortunate ten-month delay between the Neal Adams issue and the Cerebus Dreams issue, all of the dream material that we'd hope to cover *still* didn't fit into the issue.

Which brings us to *Following Cerebus* 11, which you are now holding in your hands: the *third* of the Mind Games/Cerebus Dreams issues. Yet because of a variety of circumstances, it still doesn't cover everything we'd hoped to get to. (Don't worry; next issue will move in a different direction.) For instance, this third issue was going to focus on how the dreams in *Cerebus* were or were not similar to other portrayals of dreams in comics. Did *Cerebus* continue the paths established by other series, and/or break new ground? Moreover, how does the use of dreams in comics compare to the use of dreams in other literature (Shakespeare, Carroll, etc.) and, for that matter, other art forms (such as film and television). But you will *not* find such an examination here. Could we blame:

(1) Rick Veitch? In his wonderful interview here, he mentions a recent show in Portugal that examined "dozens of dream comics and dream strips." Uh-oh. Suddenly the "dreams in comics" article was looking to be a much larger project than we'd anticipated—not something to be knocked out in a few days.

(2) Barry Windsor-Smith? His extraordinary two-volume autobiographical art books, *OPUS* 1 and 2, inspired an essay by—

(3) Dave Sim? His lengthy and fascinating look at the first volume takes up a huge chunk of this issue.

(4) Craig Miller? What began as an off-the-cuff series of faxes with Dave about Dave's essay took on a life of its own, going in strange directions that may or may not interest readers. But Craig and Dave thought they were interesting, so they edited the faxes into a dialogue, which appears here, gobbling up even more pages.

(5) Yeah, Craig, who realized as the months rolled on that the planned Part 3 was probably way too big even for its own issue—it's more of a book-length project. Suddenly he was seeing references to dreams everywhere he looked—not only the growing list of comics (and not just actual dreams in comics, but that whole slew of "imaginary stories" in the sixties, which often were framed by one of the characters dreaming the adventures; heck, that's probably an entire chapter right there), literature, and films, but even the CDs on his shelf (Kate Bush's *The Dreaming*, et al.). Suddenly it seemed as if dreams were a theme that had touched virtually every creative work he came in contact with. Forget book-length project: this might be a multi-volume library of books!

Overloaded with too much of a good thing, it was impossible to figure out where to start that would allow for a timely finish of *some* sort of manageable theme.

So eventually maybe we'll bite off small chunks and intersperse them throughout issues of *Following Cerebus*. But for now, we're a bit dreamed out.

So next issue, it'll be on to something different.

That's the plan, anyway.

This Gene Colan/Tom Palmer art from Doctor Strange *181 (with text by Roy Thomas) doesn't relate directly to* Cerebus *(or perhaps even to this issue of* Following Cerebus*— you be the judge), but it sure is gorgeous, eh?*

Thou Good and Faithful Cerebite

by Bryan Douglas

For more fun with Louis Hammerstein, Khalihari "Khali" Jones, and Janet and Roger Rogers, check out the "Dormitory Glory" archives on Bashful Bry's website: **www.suncomics.com** "It's a website!"

Collected Letters 2

P. Stephen Johnston, Ph.D. interviewed Dave Sim about the recently-published Collected Letters *2 during the First Ever Giant Plasma Screen TV iPhone Podcast Con. For instructions on how to hook up your giant plasma screen TV to your modem to stream the broadcast through your iPhone, click on www.GiPlaScreeTViPhone.com and follow the step-by-step directions. WARNING: Giant Plasma Screen TV iPhone Podcast requires a plasma screen which is a minimum of four feet by eight feet and a 2008 iPhone with a serial number between 000000001 and 009800000. For everyone else, the transcript appears below.*

Johnston: Hello Kitchener? Is that the television store? I'd give the name, but they decided against sponsoring us.
Sim: *Hello.*
PSJPhD: Mr. Sim. You're there. Well isn't this amazing. I'm in my office at the University of Texas-Oxford. Can you see me?
DS: *Yes. You take up the whole wall here. You're absolutely gigantic, and your colours are very sharply defined. My ears pop every time you lean forward.*
PSJPhD: By way of introduction, I'm the Pop Culture Advisor for *US News & World Report*, but I'm best known for my deconstruction of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman,* which by now is pretty much accepted as the definitive analysis of the series.
DS: *You don't say.*
PSJPhD: Have you ever read it?
DS: *Your analysis?*
PSJPhD: No, the *Sandman* series.
DS: *Of course. I parodied it back in the* Women—
PSJPhD: Quite an interesting series. You ought to check it out. Everybody has known for years, of course, that *Sandman* is a brilliant allegory about the Watergate scandal. I mean, Nixon, Dean, Haldeman, Liddy, Ehrlichman—all are pretty clearly represented in the series. Dig up *any* Gaiman interview, and he'll be talking about it. Seems like he couldn't shut up about Watergate for a while there. If only we had more time to get into it here, but you can read all about it on my Web site, www.GiPlaScreeTViPhone/behindthecomics.deepneilgaiman-gate.com. Only available if you have plasma screen iPhone capabilities. And, well, you can see just how amazing it is.
DS: *Yes. I can count the hairs in Richard Nixon's nostrils from here. One, two, three—*
PSJPhD: When Woodward and Bernstein acknowledged in May 2005 that Mark Felt was Deep Throat, I went back and showed how Gaiman had placed clues to his identity throughout *Sandman*, even in the very first issue. Of course, the appearance of Prez in "The Golden Boy" was the giveaway. After I published my essay online, detailing my theory of how Woodward had worked with Gaiman in developing the comic book series (including sneaking in his own cameo appearance into that famous issue), well, it pretty well established my name on the comic book blogs.
DS: *I'm not on the Internet, but as I say it certainly sounds like an interesting—*
PSJPhD: I don't blog myself. As someone once said, there are those who blog, and there are those who are blogged about.
DS: *Uh, so, I was told this interview was supposed to be about—*
PSJPhD: *Collected Letters* 2. Quite so. And let's get right to it. Even three years into "retirement," you continue to push creative boundaries. The cover, for instance—a wraparound comic strip featuring you and Chester Brown (and a hidden Harvey Pekar) sitting in a restaurant discussing the cover over lunch. On the face of it this is another one of those annoying postmodern wink-at-the-audience moments, in which constant attention is drawn to the artifact as artifact, and a distance is created between the reader and the story. You're reminding us that we're looking at the cover of a book by telling us about the creation of that book cover as we're looking at it!

But it also echoes one of the most controversial parts of the *Cerebus* storyline—the introduction of you, of "Dave Sim," into the storyline itself. This forced a dramatic shift in how readers approached the story, because suddenly everyone was being told within the story that he or she was reading a story, and that you were the author. It was a devastating blow to the illusion of the reality of the story itself and made it impossible for readers to engage with your fictional universe from that point on.
DS: *Well, I'm sure that was true for some readers, but—*
PSJPhD: So, with the cover of *Collected Letters* 2, you return as the character Dave Sim, the character who effectively disconnected the audience *from* the story.
DS: *Well, again, I don't think the entire audience—*
PSJPhD: Wouldn't you agree that the real ontological question is whether this is a depiction of the real you or merely another character in the strip? (The appearance of "Sim" in the *Cerebus* storyline forces the same question.) *Following Cerebus* 2 examined this puzzle in depth and arrived at its own conclusions, but of course each reader will have to make up his own mind. The important issue here is that the cover of *Collected Letters* brings back all of those complex philosophical questions that arose in

P. Stephen Johnston, Ph.D., is chairman of the University of Texas—Oxford. He has written for Wrapped in Plastic *and* Spectrum *magazines and is the author of the classic essay "Invitation to Love: Archetypal Symbology and the Fluctuations of the American Dream, 1823 to Present."*

Cerebus. Clearly you are not done prodding readers with such puzzles, and clearly you are completely unrepentant at having actively disconnected your audience in toto and now return to metaphorically "rub it in."

"Dave Sim" in Minds *(p. 285)*

DS: *Actually, I—well, as it says: Chester suggested to me that it might be a good idea to do the cover as a comic strip. And since I like the photorealism school best, I thought—well, why not take those photos of me and Chet and Harvey—?*

PSJPhD: You're evading the point, Mr. Sim. Beginning with the publication of *Collected Letters 2004*, I began a serious study of the ultimate fate of this "Dave Sim" character introduced in *Minds*, using the clues you provided in the sequence of boldfaced names in *Collected Letters 2004* beginning with James Owen—first as a series of the iPod plasma pamphleteering disks that I pioneered at ComiCon in 2005 as a means of bypassing the circuitous and unfocused Internet message boards and blogs to emphasize a more direct delivery system of hard Co-Co-Inf.

DS: *"Co-Co-Inf," Gracie?*

PSJPhD: Coherent Comics Information. These have been collected and revised for a forthcoming book, *The Mythology of Dave Sim: The Illusory Reality of a Contradictory Homogeneity* (the first volume in Simon and Schuster's upcoming Modern Masters of the Sequential Graphic Arts series). The *Collected Letters* volumes—actually, their *covers*—continue your exploration of the themes of identity. The "Sim" featured in photographic silhouette on the front cover of the first volume is yet another manifestation of your efforts to break down the fourth wall separating the comic book world from the real world. It was, of course, merely a "one-panel" appearance, thus preventing *Collected Letters 2004* from achieving the state of a McCloudian Sequential Narrative (see my article "A Question From the Audience" arising from Scott McCloud's panel in Ann Arbor, Michigan earlier this year). While *Cerebus* 300 revealed the fate of many of the story's characters, intriguingly it left open the fate of "Dave Sim."

DS: *Uh, well, I can certainly—I mean, I don't see it that way, but—*

PSJPhD: The cover photograph suggested that he continued his existence, yet at a distance, and indistinct. No facial details can be discerned clearly, forcing the question, "Is it even him?"

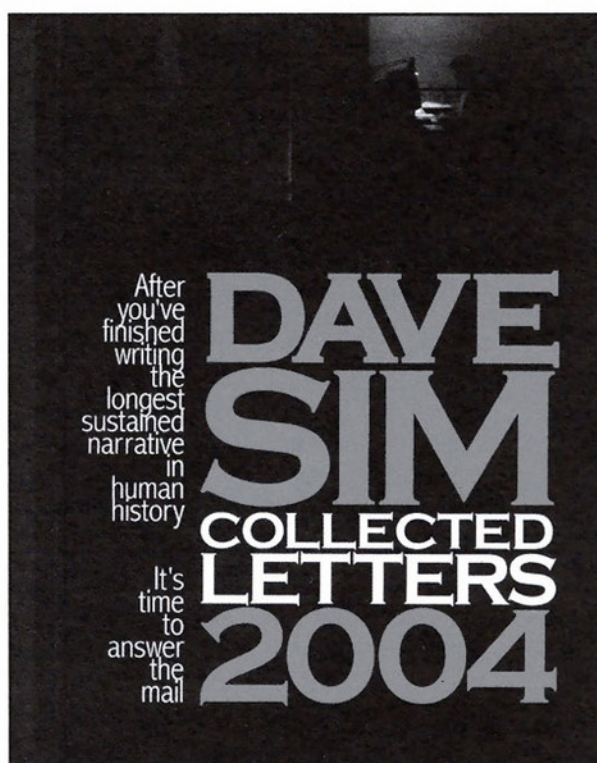
DS: *Uh, yes. Yes, it's me. Gerhard took the picture while I was writing a letter to the Fabulous Lorraine. You know, Neil Gaiman's personal assistant?*

PSJPhD: The woman that Martha Mitchell/Death is based on, yes.

DS: *Uh, no. From what I understand, Death was based on—I forget her name but—well, and I mean, Martha Mitchell was a real person. She was the wife of Attorney General John Mitchell.*

PSJPhD: In *Dream Country*, certainly, but by the middle of *A Game of You*—?

DS: *Uhh—*

PSJPhD: Jill Thompson. That was an easy one, Mr. Sim. Anyway the nearly-symmetrical photo (which continues around the back cover) puts him opposite an uninhabited room that's also dark but for a desk lamp ("light's on, nobody home"?). The logical question to ask is whether this is "Dave Sim" emerging *from* the pages of *Cerebus* or retreating back *into* the pages of the fiction. The answer seems to come from the cover of the second volume: you have returned to being a character in a comic. The cover of the first volume, then, is analogous to the startling panels in *Reads* in which the reader sees the

Cerebus story being created *within* the story itself (pp. 142, 168). But then, *a la* the Wizard of Oz, the curtain is pulled to, and the man behind the scenes retreats from view for a time. The cover to *Collected Letters 2* is a clear retreat from the reality of a photo representation (however indistinct) on the first volume. If this trend continues, you'll appear as a stick figure on the cover of *Collected Letters* 3—possibly a jam with Matt Feazell—and then the fourth volume will not feature you at all, but simply feature an independent graphic narrative, but with a word balloon shrieking, "DAVE SIM" where the three girls are on this second one. From character to photo to photorealistic character to iconic lettering of the name. Character as word balloon, word balloon as character. Taken together, then, the covers to the first two volumes may very well be a subtle plea from the reclusive creator: *I'm still here. I still have something to contribute.* Cerebus *may be completed, but please don't forget about me.*

DS: *What are you talking about? I'm not reclusive at all—I may be one of the most accessible comic book cartoonists there is. Lots of people are probably thinking not "Where did Dave go" but "Why is he still here?" And anyone who wants to can jus—*

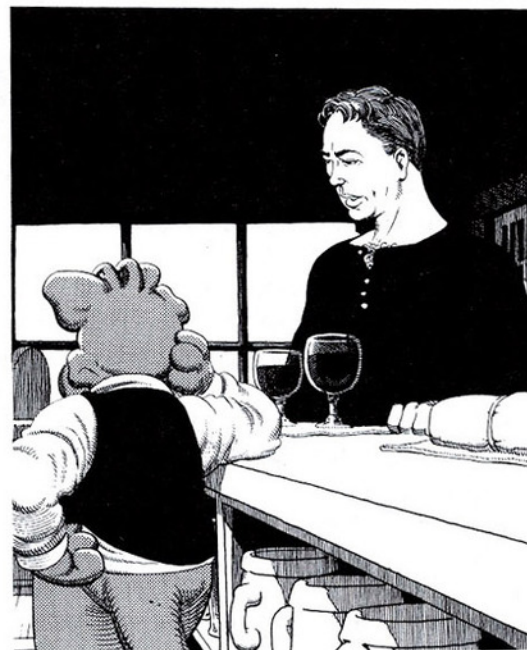
PSJPhD: Or maybe not. The cover is providing us with clues but being cagey about the answers. The front cover of volume 2 is a masterpiece of a visual representation of secrets (your admiration for Barry Windsor-Smith's allegorical prints of the seventies and eighties is well-known). Consider that the face of Harvey Pekar (or "Harvey Pekar") is obscured by the logo, and the three teenaged girls in the center of the cover (ostensibly appropriated from a newspaper ad)—

DS: *They were taken from a newspaper ad.*

PSJPhD: —are turned away but looking back at the viewer. *What are they hiding?* Clearly the reader is not "in" on their whisperings, as their body language suggests. And then there's the final panel, with Sim and Brown "laughing uproariously" at some untold joke or occurrence at the restaurant. The message of the cover, taken as a whole, is unmistakable: You will give us the *appearance* of being taken "behind the scenes," but this is an illusion. The cover is actually a little unnerving, as we, the viewers, are *almost* given some mysterious secret, only to discover that it is just out of reach. It is like the orgy scene in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, in which, after principal photography had been completed, the director digitally added figures that obscure Bill Harford's (and the film audience's) view of the more outrageous activities going on in the elegant mansion.

DS: Eyes Wide Shut*?!? What in the world does that have to do with anythi—*

PSJPhD: Let's look at those three girls for a moment. They are in the center of the illustration, which gives them importance in trying to decode the meaning of the cover.

DS: *Decode...meaning....*

"Dave Sim" in Rick's Story *(p. 193)*

PSJPhD: Note that the left girl's heel is digging into your skull in the bottom left panel—a panel in which you appear to be taking a bite of food but looks more like you're choking. It's an odd panel on its own, but taken in context, the meaning is clear—the three girls are not only taunting the readers with their unrevealed secrets, but "digging it in" with a heel to the skull. (The middle girl achieves similar symbolic import with lines—we know from another panel that they represent a tree branch, but that's not obvious from this panel—connecting the girl's foot with your shoulder. It's as if she is "stabbing you in the back"). Three—especially three females—is a prominent motif in classical mythology, and it usually is not good news. The three Fates (Atropos, Clotho, and Lachesis) dispassionately control the span of every mortal life. The three Gorgons (Medusa, Euryale, and Stheno) had the power to kill or turn onlookers into stone. And the three Sirens (usually named Leucosia, Ligeia, and Parthenope) lured sailors to their deaths. Clearly the three girls on the cover of *Collected Letters* symbolize feminism's assault on you specifically and society as a whole.

DS: Or it could just be that there were only three girls in that newspap—

PSJPhD: But what would be the point going to such extremes in creating this elaborate game for, of all things, a collection of letters?

DS: If you'll hold on for just a minute I can shed some light on—

PSJPhD: I have a theory. One of the rumors about you has been that, as with your appearance in the *Cerebus* comic book, you have continued to play a character—an anti-feminist, pro-religious character. Some of this may go back to a line in the Deni Loubert chapter of Blake Bell's *I Have To Live With This Guy* book (TwoMorrows Publishing). Bell wrote, "To this day [2002], it remains unclear whether or not [Dave] is playing the role of Andy Kaufman or Steve Ditko. Does he *really* believe [his anti-feminist stand] or is it an exaggerated marketing ploy?" (p. 146)

Is it *possible* that the *Collected Letters* cover is an elaborate clue that the letters to follow are not to be taken at face value? That this is Dave-Sim-the-character, not Dave-Sim-the-real-person? My guess is that if I were to ask you—which of course would be inappropriate on my part—you would deny that you're remaining "in character." Otherwise, why would you have gone to the trouble of hiding the idea in a BWS-like allegorical cover story instead of just coming out and declaring it? And as for keeping a prolonged mystery, you admitted in the introduction to *Minds*, "And what a relief and a terror it was...answering the *who, what, where, when,* and *why's* I've been keeping secret for nearly twenty years. It's not easy keeping a secret for twenty years, you know."

Whatever the case, the cover—and I haven't even opened the book yet—

DS: Oh really!

PSJPhD: —shows that you remain a daring and challenging creative force, not just in content, but in form. Opening to the first page of the volume—

DS: Finally! We're going to discuss the contents of the—

PSJPhD: —I'm struck by the immediacy of the message. Dispensing with the usual title and copyright pages that begin virtually every book ever published, you launch directly into the first letter. I know you're "not much of an FYI guy," and your design of the book suggests that you will waste no time in getting to the topics at hand. This reminds me of when you eliminated the issue-by-issue titles in *Cerebus* and simply continued the story from where it ended in the previous issue. When collected as trade paperbacks, there were no longer chapter headings, but simply one ongoing story. *Collected Letters 2* picks up exactly one day after the end of the first volume, *Collected Letters 2004*. Symbolically, the lack of a title page connects the two volumes in a more seamless way, allowing the reader to glide with fewer interruptions, as it were, from the first to the second book.

DS: The truth is that the printer screwed up.

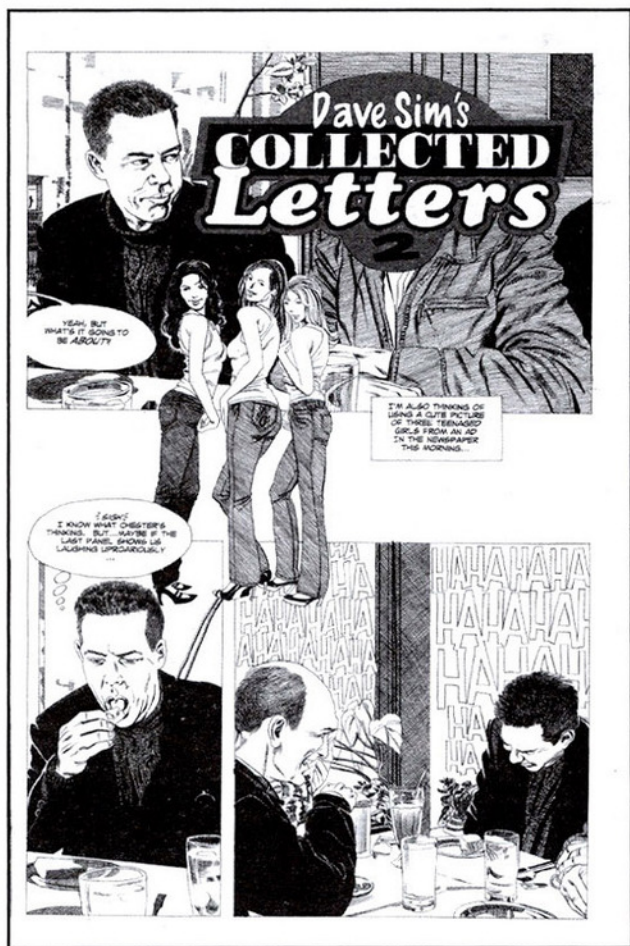
PSJPhD: But you always work on more than one level, and the elimination of the copyright page obviously points to the big copyright debate on *Cerebus* (covered back in *Following Cerebus* 3). In *Cerebus* 300, you announced your desire that the series would eventually become a public domain work. *Collected Letters 2004* was copyrighted 2005, but could it be that you saw a disconnect between your anti-copyright stance on *Cerebus* and your copyright on the letters? Granted, it would seem an unlikely prospect at this time that others would publish volumes of these letters, but it's still a unique stance.

DS: Actually, Claude Flowers sent the letters on one disk and the rest of the material on another disk, and the printers just made a—

PSJPhD: The lack of title and copyright pages are not the only changes between volumes one and two. The second contains no index, which was immensely useful in locating topics and names in the first one. What does *this* mean?

DS: Uh, Claude's doing the Collected Letters *books on a volunteer basis. Besides his full-time job, he's in the Army Reserve, he has a wife, and an index takes a long time to—*

PSJPhD: Perhaps you decided not to make things too easy for us. Like working through your Torah commentaries in *Latter Days*, revelation and insight is best appreciated when it is worked for.

DS: I'm sure that's true in the larger sense, but really—the

first index had Claude and Gerhard both pulling their hair out.

PSJPhD: But they aren't comic book characters.

DS: *Well, no. I was just answering your question about—*

PSJPhD: But you *are* a comic book character. You were a comic book character in *Minds*, a comic book character on the cover of *Collected Letters* 2, a stick figure on the cover of volume 3, a word balloon on the cover of volume 4. There's only one obvious next step.

DS: *I haven't even done the cover of volume 3 yet. Matt Feazell's a great guy, but I'm not sure—*

PSJPhD: Well, fine. If you insist on biasing the issue by restricting our discussion to the present and past tense, I'm more than happy to approach my thesis from a more oblique angle, since there's another obvious change between the first and second volumes—the size. The first volume measures 7.5" x 10", the same size as the *Cerebus* trades. It had 598 pages. The second volume measures 6" x 9" and contains 224 pages.

DS: *Preney Press was the printer on* Cerebus *and the trades for years. They went out of business, so I had to find anoth—*

PSJPhD: When placed alongside the seventeen trades (twenty-three if you include the *Swords of Cerebus* volumes), it breaks the aesthetic unity. Interestingly, this smaller version is the first volume to be released following the departure of Gerhard from Aardvark-Vanaheim. Can this be a coincidence, or does the book symbolically represent the smaller company? Considering your past work, I would lean toward the latter. Gerhard gone, past tense, smaller company, present tense. There's still only one obvious next step. Over to you, Mr. Sim.

DS: *Could we please discuss the content of the book?*

PSJPhD: Okay, we're getting to the meat of the book. And the first page here is a perfect example. Throughout the years, you have shown yourself always to be cognizant of the marketing aspect of your work. You never let it dominate the art, but you are always aware of its necessity. You remain true to form in *Collected Letters 2*, as the first letter—the one the readers see upon opening the title page-less book—is one from Gary Groth, publisher of *The Comics Journal*, with whom you have had some stormy relations over the years. It may not have the same marketing value as beginning the volume with a letter to Jeff Smith, but it's certainly more of an attention-grabber than beginning with a letter to some anonymous fan or an indicia page. You don't even pass up a chance to promote *Following Cerebus*, on the first page, you clever dog you!

DS: *It was a mistake on the printer's part. I already told you. That's just the way it is..*

PSJPhD: *[with a wink]* Of *course* it is, Dave!

DS: *No really. Look, are we going to talk about the contents of the book? I think there are a lot of good things in it. Discussions of feminism and God and entertainment and politics and—*

PSJPhD: Well yes, of course. All that good stuff. But, you know, many of us already have all of the individual issues of *Cerebus* and have read all of the Aardvark Comments.

DS: *Okay, but this isn't that.*

PSJPhD: Of course it is. A collection of those columns.

DS: *No, it couldn't be. If you just look at the dates of the let—*

PSJPhD: I hear what you're saying. I just wish you would have reprinted the other sides of the letters. At *least* you could have noted which issues the material originally appeared in so that we could go look it up ourselves. C'mon Dave, help us out here!

DS: *Think about it.* Cerebus *300 came out in March 2004. These letters don't even start until June of 2004. What is?*

PSJPhD: What is what?

DS: *What's the next obvious step?*

PSJPhD: Oh, I thought you'd see that one right away. *The New Adventures of Giant Plasma Screen TV iPhone Podcast Dave Sim.* Trademark and copyright P. Stephen Johnston, PhD Giant Plasma Screen TV iPhone Podcast Comics & Stories.

DS: *WHAT?!?!*

PSJPhD: Don't go away. We'll be right back with my newest and greatest creation, *Giant Plasma Screen TV iPhone Podcast Alan Moore!*

Moore: 'ere, wot?

About Last Issue

by
Dave Sim

Barry Windsor-Smith's *OPUS* 1 and the Endless Waves of Time

Or "That's Funny. He Seemed Okay When I Met Him For The First Time Four Months Later"

Mention of the Endless Waves of Time in Craig Miller's introduction to Barry Windsor-Smith's "Cerebus Dreams" last issue reminded me that I've never gotten around to writing about BWS's paranormal confessionals in *OPUS* 1 and 2. I actually made the attempt—or started the attempt—with the introduction he asked me to write for his *Young Gods* collection four years ago, but I only got into the on-deck circle of what I was trying to say before he pulled the plug. Has anyone before in history ever been "fired" from writing a book introduction? Might have had something to do with my being on page 12 (or was it 18?) and I hadn't mentioned *The Young Gods* yet.

Anyway, he describes in *OPUS* 1 two linked paranormal events, the first taking place pretty much at the outset of his work on *Conan* for Marvel Comics (around issue 7) while he was still living at his parents' place in England:

Bright sun flashed through the lace curtains at the bay window, and flecked shadows from the tree beyond were filtered breezily through the shimmering white and yellow. In these backlit shadows, a tall moustachioed man stood talking to a lady at his right, who was smiling and nodding as he said, "They're gonna love it," *and she laughed prettily, replying,* "Oh, yeah."

The second occurred three years later when he had emigrated to America and was living in New York, sharing a studio with two other commercial artists and his first girlfriend, Carol (one of the artists' assistants), hard at work on his legendary and frequently reprinted "Red Nails" adaptation.

Because Charlie [White III, one of the commercial artists] *had failed to thrill the art directors at Levi Strauss with his designs for a full-page* Rolling Stone *advertisement, he had suggested to me an idea that could capitalize on the popularity of the* Conan *comics, A Shadizarian bazaar-like setting, all crowded with furtive strangers and exotic women, and a Conan type, clad in chain-mail and arcane whatsits, standing at a colourful market stall, displaying a plethora of twinkling, intricately patterned broadswords, dirks, sabers, copper and silver shields of all blazons and styles, incense burners, steel helmets with crenelated patterns or brilliant red plumage, at the temples, more swords, more daggers – and Levi's "Original Fit" blue jeans.*

BWS being BWS—even back in those pre-BWS days—knocks out an ad comp based on the idea in roughly 90 minutes while everyone else is out at lunch.

I continued to work for a little while then went to see what Charlie thought of my sketch. As I entered the room, turning right into the short hall, I saw Carol and Charlie standing with their backs to the big sunny window. They were studying the Levi's/Conan drawing...as Charlie said, "They're gonna love it!" *and Carol laughed lightly and agreed with* "Oh, yeah!"

...it seemed as if the floor beneath me vanished, reappeared, vanished again, and was just coming back when, with Charlie and Carol still talking to me from somewhere very far away, I experienced a hard shove to my central perception of self, as if my awareness was pushed to the left of what I had hitherto not identified as my "center of consciousness," my oneness...While my brain was attempting to absorb this psychic storm, the floor of the studio to my left disappeared before my eyes to be replaced by a vast swirling mass of gases and billowing clouds of indistinguishable matter, all turning in a circular motion around new-forming globes burning like suns. Everything I could see was of varying hues and intensities of red. Red everywhere.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but I think Barry got ker-whomped but good by YHWH. Certainly a lot more than I got six years later and, arguably—unless someone else turns up later on—he is the individual who has gotten more on-going attention from YHWH than any other living human being I could think of. And I think that selection took place because of his choice to pursue a creative life and that his selection was based on his considerable and exceptional (if not entirely unique!) attributes, not the least of which is his near-superhuman resilience (anyone else would have gone quite mad experiencing even half of the events he relates to the reader) and personal integrity.

(Marvel would have done their bit with the same level of tedious, arbitrary petty dictatorial editorial fiat which would later compel the Image boys to jump ship at the height of their popularity and the *Rolling Stone* Levi's ad, I suspect would have proved to be the equivalent of the cartoon drawing of Ringo Starr that Frank Frazetta had done in the mid-sixties which had suddenly launched his own career into paperback covers and movie posters—but probably on a much larger scale and, like most commercial careers, it would have proved to be a) incredibly lucrative b) incredibly short-lived and c) fatal to his prodigious aesthetic sensibilities)

Since YHWH and God (so far as I've been

able to determine) function on a level where time exists in a very unified fashion—the past *is* the present *is* the future—I suspect it was a matter of YHWH plotting the trajectory of Barry Smith's creative life, locating a primary "fork in the road" and giving him an extra ker-whomp to get him back to what YHWH would see as "the straight and narrow."

As Barry himself put it in *OPUS* 1, "I never regained my mega-popularity once my path of choice deviated from the broadway of commerce and profit above all."

Evidence would seem to suggest that one of the challenges in being God and being YHWH and in establishing efficacy—or, rather, Efficacy—on the Grand Scale is the extent to which you can engage in a minor action and, from there, that everything can be left to unfold without interference to your own advantage. Obviously if the past *is* the present *is* the future simultaneously, there is no problem with just ker-whomping someone every day or so for years on end until they have been battered into the form you intended for them, but that rather invalidates the idea of their being a follower of you or of your own plan unfolding through them. The reiterated interference with free will is too frequent and too dramatic which, in turn, invalidates the results. The challenge on the Grand Scale, as I perceive it, is to limit the parameters of the ker-whomp to the narrowest window of present time (as perceived by the lucky contestant living in a conventional context of sequentially unfolding time) and to have that be sufficient to set a favourable course over the ensuing years and decades until mortality takes the participant out of the game. The person has to make independent choices which ultimately validate the views of whichever being they choose to align themselves with—God or YHWH.

Reading between the lines of Barry's confessional, without that extra ker-whomp three years later on, I suspect he would have been quickly seduced into the world of commercial art where he would have been paid for a single ad comp roughly what he would make from the entire "Red Nails" story and that in examining his fifth-dimensional trajectory (through both space and time), that was what the YHWH saw. I think his trajectory was unique in that it required only that one course correction in order to serve YHWH's purposes from that point forward with no danger of back-sliding, "selling out" or otherwise becoming lost to the other team (God's: Windsor-Smith makes a great point of being at the diametric opposite of all forms of conventional and unconventional monotheism) or to self-negation (a beer-swilling mundane humanist vegetating in front of the tube every night).

There is even a secondary vision—a course correction on the course correction, if I'm reading him correctly—of a traffic jam that Barry sees at his parents' house in England and then actually sees when—significantly—on a Saturday when, alone in the studio, he is drawing at the board used by the other commercial illustrator, Kenny, unconsciously (as I see it) toying with the idea of "moving up", metaphorically, from his own drawing board which "faced a plain white wall" to the more affluent confines at a board which "looked out through a window, northward up Lexington Avenue" where the big money is made. Window=money in Manhattan. The traffic jam, described in the initial enactment in 1970 consists of "a clogged intersection where two white trucks had stalled between traffic lights." It is a deafening cacophony of blaring horns and shouts until:

Finally, distracted and withered of patience, I leaned forward to see what the hell was going on. Eastbound 26th Street was blocked, apparently somewhere at the Third Avenue end, while two white refrigerator trucks, both bearing the same company lettering, had jumped the light at the Lexington intersection and stalled there, blocking the flow of downtown traffic on Lex. I took all this in as, for the second time in twenty-four hours, my mind started to swirl. Circular formations of stars and planets, this time actuating to my right, roiled around in gaseous red clouds against a backdrop of deep magenta.

The view out of Kenny's window was overlaid with the exact same scene, with all its accompanying car horns, as I had seen three years earlier, but where the walls of the studio once stood, now I could see the pattern on the carpet on the floor of my parents' home. I stepped back from the window, staring into the roaring red abyss to my right. I was not scared of what I was seeing – in a way I think I was too scared to be scared – but in utter awe of this vision of crimson clouds of whirling cosmic dust on a cosmically huge scale. It was as if each tiny particle, churning in the wake of huge wheeling winds, was a birthing planet.

It seems apparent to me that this is "sealing" the initial lesson. The two trucks, bearing the same company lettering, are manifestations of the two aspects of BWS's creativity stalled at the metaphorical intersection between his past and his future. The message is plain—they are similar (ostensibly identical) but disparate and, more to the point, wholly incompatible. There is the dichotomy between the lucrative dead end of commercial art or the onward pursuit of the original trajectory, the original impulse towards expressions of his soul. The message of the roaring red abyss is that this is the road less travelled and the one he is being impelled towards. "Impelled" understates the case:

Then I felt the same nudge or shove to my perceived center, just as I had the day before. A separate presence seemed to slip into my central perception of self, and in so doing the cosmic swirlings and gaseous billowings slowed down and settled into a becalmed vista of dizzying beauty, so endless as to be beyond the scope of description. The distances I could perceive between different planets or star clusters were utterly distinct in their vivid colors and depth. To see across such

distances that can only be measured by time and the speed of light, I knew I was experiencing a paradox, a mind-bending phenomenon that allowed me to be just where I was and yet be everywhere else as well – between the gulfs of planets, amid the blinding ribbons of millions of stars.

Or, more to the point, being seduced by the illusion that the stars are far more densely packed than they, in fact, are—the YHWHistic conceit that Light and Heat are the governing circumstances of reality everywhere in the universe and that darkness and dark matter, takes up roughly the same amount of room. On the contrary: quite sizes of stars and completely unimaginable distance between them is required to create the illusion of starry "clusters" since the distances between even the closest stars (leaving aside dual star systems) are beyond human reckoning even in the realm of the theoretical. Everywhere in space, there is far more space than there is stars and it requires a completely unimaginable expanse of dark matter set in circular wave motion—the rippling of the very fabric of the dark matter of which space is largely made up to accumulate sufficient dust to create even a relative pinpoint of light in the blackness. From everywhere except close proximity, that is all that a star is or ever can be, a temporary pinpoint of light. But the illusion can be seductive:

Just before this stunning vision dissolved into the normalness of a room in midtown Manhattan, a bright white light soared from out of the nearest lower right void and fired upward. It then arced and came about to form an enormous circle, possibly light years in circumference, as its head met its tail. Then four bright pinpoints of light fired in sequence along its path. In an utterly illuminated state of consciousness, I knew that these four lights represented the physical energy of the two future-sight/past-sight phenomena that I had experienced yesterday and today.

I felt and understood that I was a part of everything that I was seeing before me, that I and the stars were profoundly related as if by birth, but separated by some yet-to-be realized circumstance.

A yet-to-be realized circumstance which, in plain fact, is inescapably delusional and which I would maintain is one of YHWH's core delusions: that there is a shared context with something that far away. The only discernible reality of the stars is that they are, demonstrably, not the Big Bang but feeble imitations of it. YHWH pretending to be God and failing dramatically in the attempt. All of the stars are too far away for us to discern anything but the most rudimentary facts about them. The Red Shift/Blue Shift tells us where they are relative to the location of the Big Bang and how fast they're hurtling outward from that location. Fine-tuned detection can tell us where they are, relatively speaking, in their life spans and what proportion of them is hydrogen and what proportion is helium. If they have a large enough planet orbiting them that fact can be detected by measuring the diminishment and curvature of the light around the planet when it passes between the star and ourselves. Or, rather, it can tell us what that planet was doing untold millennia ago when the light we are finally seeing first started making its way towards us. It's a peculiar form of kinship if you try to force the meaning of kinship upon it (again, a core YHWHistic delusion). Space is the reality, a star is a peculiar isolated aberration relative to that reality.

And, of course, flattery will get you everywhere. The four lights possibly light years apart, flaring to life and representative of the future-sight/past sight experiences of the two fateful sequential days. Wouldn't four light bulbs over his head have communicated the idea just as effectively? One is reminded of The Studio jape when BWS decided his first oil painting would be Fate Sowing the Stars: "Jeez, Barry. Couldn't you start with, you know, a bowl of fruit?"

It seems apparent to me that from the git-go, the YHWH had Much Larger Plans for the young Brit ex-patriot. His trajectory, apart from that secondary ker-whomp, was entirely pure (this from his metaphorical creative offspring who attempts to measure such things to the last micron where possible). And, as we have seen, whatever complaints anyone might have with BWS, he certainly never "sold out" and has hewed to the "straight and narrow" artistic path if anyone has ever since that dislocating moment in 1973.

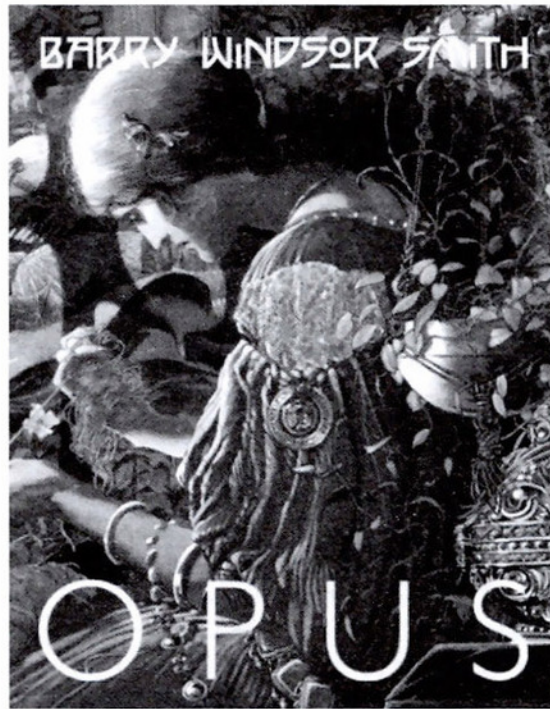
And, the evidence would seem to suggest, that YHWH's Plans centered on the nature of Creation as YHWH conceives of it. Thus Barry's ker-whomp was supplemented with a vision of "new-forming globes burning like suns" which I suspect was YHWH's idea of a vision that would prove inspirational and that, in the fullness of time, would cause Barry to produce The True Origin of YHWH to universal acclaim and an exponential spike in the number of YHWH followers (as opposed to God followers) unheard of since the time of Adam's third son Sheth, "When men began to call on the name of the YHWH": something on the order of J.K. Rowling (does that look like a *natural-occurring* success to you?) only with paintings.

This particularly interested me when I was reading *OPUS* 1, since I was quite far along on the same trail, between my reading of the Bible over the previous three years and gradually developing the working model of Creation reality which would eventually become *Cerebus* 289-290 (or, if you prefer, the Prologue to *The Last Day*). I had already come to the conclusion that YHWH was the living thing within the earth, misguidedly believing that he/she/it was God and that most of the Bible concerned itself with the contention between these two divergent viewpoints (most strikingly in God's version of creation in Genesis 1 and YHWH's in Genesis 2 and 3).

The Endless Waves of Time was something that I had envisioned as well not long before *OPUS* 1 was released in 1999. At the time, it seemed to validate my suspicion that around the turn of the millennium there would be a sudden explosion of thematically linked creative revelations, constituting different parts of the puzzle. "Okay, Barry's is one of them," I thought. I was relieved that he hadn't actually seemed to piece anything together, yet, and (Ego, Thy Name is Dave) hoped that he wouldn't do so before March of 2003 when I would have my own kick at the Creationist cat. I did not expect that we were the only two thinking in these terms and that the changeover from 1999 to 2000 would be dominated by the silly idea of a catastrophic Y2K computer glitch (Folly, Thy Name is Everyone Else).

All that was required, I think, was that I should not question, nor turn away in disbelief...I do not know how many black waves streamed to my shore. I was counting at first, but I lost track as the accumulations began to overwhelm me. Each wave carried all the experiences, knowledge and truths of the preceding waves, while manifesting as an unprecedented truth in itself. Every thought and experience throughout all Time was enfolded into these waves of immeasurable, inexpressible volume. From my small perspective, it was neverending...The black waves continued to roll toward my shore, and each wave was an unconditional revelation. Each was moreso than the one before, and in such proportion that my will to acknowledge, comprehend and accept was shattered and reassembled continuously; often just in time to have it shattered yet again, then reassembled.

As far as I can see this is basically a Ground Zero point of view on Genesis 1:2—God's spirit moving upon the face of the waters—which I elaborated on in *The Last Day* pages 3,4 and 5. My own suspicion is that the wave motion is elliptical or circular in motion and was the foundation of the Big Bang and the creation of all the stars and galaxies since then. Essentially, what I think YHWH was doing with Barry was conveying his/her/its best recollections of how he/she/it ended up in the middle of the earth and that those best recollections involved both the creation of stars, the stars in our immediate vicinity, our sun, suns in general and the creation of the planets. Again, I think this goes all the way back to the Big Bang and the seminal God's spirit (the original YHWH) who first gathered all of the dust and awareness in an unimaginably large area into one spot at God's direction, who then inhabited the incandescent result and who was hurled outward in the resulting (down to the 50th decimal place) balance of implosive and explosive force.

What YHWH, I think, basically wants to know is: Why do I keep doing this? Why did I start doing this? What is my point? While trying not to appear ignorant by asking anything directly. And that, at least theoretically, as I see it, is where Barry—and all of us who have gotten ker-whomped to one degree or another—comes in.

This leads to a certain amount of inadvertent comedy (for which, so far as I know, I am at present the only audience member). At the beginning of *OPUS* 2, Barry writes:

Trying to settle back into my routines, I returned to the pages of Robert E. Howard's Red Nails *story that I had left strewn about my desk the previous Sunday. It was just then that I experienced the first post Endless Waves event that I can recall with certainty. A droning monologue erupted in my head, asking "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?"*

I mean, it's hard not to empathize with both sides. Barry's just been knocked in the psyche six ways to Sunday but is living in the most expensive

city on the planet working for the most parsimonious employer on the planet and trying to make his rent. At the same time this is YHWH's best stuff—his/her/its deepest darkest secrets and most profound inner visions and earliest memories. New-forming globes, burning like suns, The Endless Waves of Time. His/Her/Its Grandest Inspiration. And Barry limps back to his drawing board to work on the schlock pulp novel adaptation of an author who had been dead more than thirty years.

I really don't think YHWH gets it. I'm sure he/she/it expected—having been ker-whomped but good—that Barry, eyes glittering, would leap to his drawing board and produce a series of paintings documenting the Endless Waves of Time and the Birth of Stars and, inside of a fortnight, he would have transformed Manhattan, the United States and the World with his Origin of Everything According to YHWH, pulling all the threads together and, like some weird foreshadowing of J. K. Rowling, leaving the world agog in his wake, all of them eager to sign up for—

—whatever it is that YHWH, inexplicably, keeps thinking everyone is going to sign up for someday when they finally realize that everything wasn't created by someone named God, that everything was created by the awareness in the molten core at the heart of the third planet from a tiny and unexceptional sun.

"Laugh at ME, will they? The FOOLS! TELL them, Barry." There's a lot of Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond in YHWH.

Of course experiences with YHWH are only comedic long after the fact and only when they are happening to someone else. Between Barry and myself, though, I think God has gotten a lot of mileage out of the comic-book medium which seems to exist in a total YHWHistic blind spot. You can subject BWS to the Eternal Waves of Time, you can show him the infinite reaches of the universe in a single crimson abyss, but you'll never make him forget Jack Kirby in the process. Anything after Barry's first exposure to Jack Kirby's work could only prove to be, in a real sense, Jack Kirby window-dressing, a Jack Kirby enhancement. Having created BWS, God knew that. God Himself would be very far to the back of BWS's personal line-up behind Jack Kirby…and John Lennon…and Pink Floyd. Nothing new for God. They either eventually come around or they don't. That's what free will is for. But, that's a tough punch to roll with when, like YHWH, you are used to seeing your own visions as the *ne plus ultra* of visual information. "I'm showing him the hidden nature of all realities, and he'd rather read something called the *Fantastic Four*."

I was probably two-thirds of the way through *Cerebus* and YHWH was still waiting for me to start my promised book. The book that was supposed to explain everything about YHWH and reveal YHWH to the world. "A Comic Book?! I'm going to be revealed to the world in a Comic Book?!!"

YHWH never quite heard the chortle of God behind the early twentieth century expression "See you in the funny papers."

In his aborted *Storyteller* series, Paradoxman Chapter 9 the titular character, Tristan Caine whom BWS identifies as one of his alter egos literally beats his female therapist to death. Barry addresses this very early in the OPUS proceedings and is plainly at a loss to explain where the outburst came from and confesses later that he drew the whole thing in a complete trance. It seems obvious to me that this was his unconscious mind rebelling at what he had been living through, at that time for more than a quarter of a century. Method-acting Tristan—and he frankly admits that much of *Storyteller* was improvised "on the fly" very much in the nature of Living Theatre—I think he tapped into the deep resentments that this was the life he had been impelled towards, that he was still compulsively and creatively attempting to figure out what was expected of him, what it is that he was supposed to be doing

Tristan from Paradoxman in BWS: Storyteller *1*

having long since abandoned all but the most cursory idea of what he *wanted* to do being in any way a factor in his life. It was less his life and more "his" life and had been since he was in his early twenties. A life that he wasn't so much *living* as a life that was being *done to him*. I know what that's like. It's bad enough when it ultimately leads you to God. When it is all done in the name of and for the sake of an arbitrary being as insubstantial and understandable as quicksilver, there has to be a radiant subtext of But, What About Me? What About My Life?

Method act the glib reassurance of the jargon-spouting therapist as another allegory of the Dominant Force in a life which has been an endless series of allegories and enactments and portrayals and renderings but, really, not much of a life per se, and the thing that's apt to come bubbling to the surface is:

Ker-whomp me? No, no. Ker-whomp You!

There is the startling panel later on where Tristan sees the therapist, still discussing his therapy in placid terms, as a hideous alien creature. I can't say that I disagree with the unconscious sentiment expressed.

It's a recurrent motif in BWS's work—within his single pictures, his comic stories and even the occasional piece of commercial work like the menu for La Medusa restaurant—which constitutes an on-going series of enactments of his on-going relationship with YHWH.

Claudia Medusa had the finest restaurant around; her cooking was superbly inspired. On the first Saturday after my full-page ad appeared in the newspaper, hundreds of people turned up at the restaurant. It was a madhouse – even I couldn't find a place to sit.

Unfailingly, there comes like clockwork, in these anecdotes the "inner workings" revelation hard on the heels of a flat observation like the above. Barry sees this as an intrinsic dualism in his life. Like an anecdote told by a husband where, as sure as God made little green apples, the wife will append some course correction, some plot amendment right at the end there: "Unfortunately Claudia had been pulled away from the kitchen due to a family emergency, and her only assistant had to do all of the cooking for the entire evening." That is, even in recounting an enactment, there needs to be drawn a distinction between proxy and proxy. The idea of YHWH, even once removed, unbecomingly labouring in the kitchen like some pedestrian housewife while Barry, his/her/its chosen supplicant looks for a place to sit down strikes a sour note with a being as forensically concerned with appearances as YHWH is. Who gets the Dawn/Don Quixote line and who is the somewhat comedic sidekick Sancho in the paint-bespattered smock? Three guesses and the first two don't count. So the quiet inner voice reminds Barry that it was the *assistant* who cooked all the meals that evening and impels him to include it to sustain the intended metaphorical hierarchy. And so he includes it and then, I imagine, sits contemplating the next line, opting ultimately for an ironic observation, ostensibly a non sequitur on its surface: "Let us now praise advertising" but really seeing (in a way and perhaps unconsciously) too clearly beneath the surface. There is something of the religious and the ritualistic in this La Medusa business, his unconscious mind (so long enslaved and abused, it retains the bemused and acidic wit of George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in the face of the YHWH-like Martha) reminds him from behind its jester's mask: even though it's ostensibly just an anecdote about a small town restaurant. Well, yes. It is that, and it was that. But it was also the enactment of a kind of pagan sanctuary temporarily built by a YHWH proxy and Barry's illustration and typography talents. Did the assistant *really* cook all the meals that night? Had there *actually* been a family emergency? Or were these false memories implanted to maintain the metaphorical purity of YHWH's self-appointed high station? Was there any night when Claudia Medusa *did* labour in the kitchen and serve the now seated BWS as a small reward for his labours on her behalf? One rather hopes so, as small compensation for the mute helplessness of all these meticulously rendered and flaccid knights sprawled helplessly in the laps of all these Temptresses of Icy-Visage (their modest bosoms like sculpted marble, their poisonous thoughts a million miles away).

Who else but Barry could even *know* someone with a name like Claudia Medusa living in Saugerties (We're Not Quite Woodstock, But We're Near There) New York, of all places? In *OPUS* 1, the classically romantic figure drawing on the menu is a 19th century angel (although if you look closely there's the omnipresent serpent twined around her wrist: that ain't no bracelet) (the even more omnipresent Gorgon/Medusa of legend—now a beautiful woman in BWS's iconography; flattery will get you everywhere—peeking from beneath the outstretched wing) is followed on overleaf by a hunched figure of a woman with a classically beautiful face and hair wrapped in (a blanket? Wings?) with the claws of a vulture peeking from beneath. "The Witch 1978" pen and ink.

"She lives in that thicket," he informs us. "She waddles like a pigeon into the spiralled bracken and nestles there like a funnel spider."

Just so. Many and varied are the self-images of the YHWH most particularly in his/her/its female aspect. One of the most jarring notes in the first volume is the appearance of the recurrent image of a beautiful woman juxtaposed with a man's severed head. They are depicted out of chronological order, the two earliest apparently being "Wine" [1978, pen and ink, watercolour] possibly predated by "Red Wine" [1978 Pencil, coloured pencil, watercolour—the only one the features some blood, hence, presumably, the adjective] and "The Head of the Baptist" [1978 pen and ink, watercolour,

gouache].

"I have a series of these for a never-published folio called *Decapita.* I wanted to make beauty where Bernie Wrightson makes ugly." You really have to be in thrall to YHWH to see a decapitated man as having any form of beauty. I mean, on the one hand, he's a good-looking guy on the other hand, it's a severed head. Call me old-fashioned but the "severed" part seems to me to take it out of any theoretical realm of beauty. The following year would bring "The Head of Perseus" [1979 Oil wash], a reversal of the Gorgon sister of legend where the beautiful woman with snakes for hair holds aloft the severed head of the Greek champion. The rendering in all cases is indescribably beautiful so long as you ignore the subject matter. For me, personally, all of these Greek myths that incorporate non-human/human hybrids bespeak the out-of-control juncture in society that our own society is just now coming up on. Genetically mutating your head so that it grows snakes instead of hair, strikes me as one of those logic-of-the-next-step things close to the end of the line when your starting point is lions with the heads of men and half-men, half-horses. Once you learn to accommodate lions with the heads of men and half men half horses, the question becomes one of: What can you do to cause a serious level of revulsion when you have so debased your society that nothing is any longer seen as revolting? Live snakes instead of hair. That just might do it. Get the "turned to stone" shocked reaction that you've been looking for. People spontaneously vomiting at first sight of it. To the sensibility that goes in for that sort of thing (the piercing/tattoo crowd) that would, I imagine, be the cat's pyjamas.

"The snakes are symbolic of her failings, they're the dark side of the soul," BWS writes in his commentary on "Medusa VII," "The tragic part of the poetical muse." Vomiting at the sight of her, in other words, would only exacerbate what was probably a very unhappy childhood for her *and* for her snakes. How would you like to live your entire life just writhing around on someone's head? Isn't it true that snakes, after all, are people, too, just like us? I doubt that very many scholars of Greek mythology expected to live long enough to see the advent of the first Gorgon apologist. In the *description* of "Wine" Barry writes

Bacchanalian rites of the grape harvest. A fine art agent I was using in the late 70s was so enamoured of this picture that he asked my permission to use it on his wedding invitation. I advised him to look a little harder and he'd see why that wasn't such a good idea. He studied and stared and eventually said, "It's absolutely beautiful – please, let me use it." "The guy on the left...?" I huffed, "He's, like, dead.*" He squinted at it then looked back at me and asked, "Hey, how come?" I didn't employ him much after that.*

At the risk of likewise being cast out of the *OPUS* Garden of Eden as a self-evident heretic, I'm moved to reiterate the question divided into: How Come #1: If "Wine" was about beauty, what would be wrong with using it on a wedding invitation? You could just annotate it with something about Bacchanalian rites of the grape harvest and "With All My Worldly Goods Do Thee Endow, Starting Right Now From The Shoulders Up" in Gaelic font, and maybe, you know, tie it into the décor of wherever the Bacchanalian reception was being held. It would be an esoteric step up from Chicago's "Color My World" anyway. And How Come #2: How come the guy is dead because of Bacchanalian rites of the grape harvest? That is, is there some really obvious, larger, more beautiful "in tune with the stars" justification of ritualistic murder and corpse mutilation that escapes me because of some smaller, less beautiful, "less in tune with the stars" level of sophistication on my part? Smaller, less beautiful, "less in tune with the stars" but still inquiring natures like my own, you know, RILLY would like to know if it's, like, something TOTALLY OBVIOUS we just can't, you know, totally GROK, man.

In "The Head of the Baptist" [1978 pen and ink, watercolour gouache] gone is the silver charger of the Gospel narrative. Instead Salome clutches the Prophet's severed head crushing it passionately to her bosom and appears to be feverishly kissing his hair. "There was a life-size version of this design but I'll be damned if I can find it." That might be more literally true—

"The Head of Perseus" (detail)

much to YHWH's amusement—than he suspected when he wrote the annotation.

It's hard to know what YHWH makes of all this given the singular amount of time and energy that he/she/it appears to have devoted to BWS. It's worth noting that BWS is an ardent anti-self-publisher, having turned his back on his own Gorblimey Press some years before. It seems obvious to me that from Marvel to Valiant to Dark Horse and now, finally, to Fantagraphics YHWH has had the advantage of being able to pull the plug whenever and however she/he/it has deemed it necessary. Atheists—particularly the devout atheists who make up the vast majority of the comic-book field—are like sock puppets for YHWH. When *Storyteller's* different series seemed to be getting no nearer to setting the world on fire with YHWH Fever than the initial serialization of "Red Nails", when the explication of how YHWH had created everything way back in the beginning and the crimson abyss and the billions and billions of stars had made only tangential appearances as background subjects in BWS's various pictures, cartoons and graphic novels I imagine it was a small matter to move the Image partners to mount the Deathmate crossover with Valiant that proved to be the latter company's undoing, and later to have Mike Richardson renege on several clear understandings of how the *Storyteller* experiment was supposed to work which left the whole thing as a pile of gleaming shards while Mike himself was completely unaffected and perplexed that something seemed to be *bothering* BWS about his suggestions of what they needed to do to take *Storyteller* to the next level.

Maybe he/she/it really likes *OPUS*.

The first volume came out in 1999, the second in 2000. Work is, presumably, progressing on the third volume. All those "Artemis and Apollo" variations [1976, 1980, 1985, 1989] are suddenly explicable, anyway. Artemis is depicted as the moon, Apollo as the sun—female and male. By 1976 this was not nearly as symmetrical as it had been seen to be thousands of years before in the Greek Isles when the twin orbs of roughly comparable size pursued each other from horizon to horizon. "You're saying I, She-YHWH am a somnambulant little chunk of dead rock and that I, He-YHWH am an alert, radiant and giant blazing star." Never start with the assumption that wherever YHWH is she can't get a subscription to *National Geographic* or get the Science Channel. It would take any number of Perseus heads, any number of flaccid supplicating knights to offset just so unintentional an insult.

I hope he/she/it likes *OPUS*. Likes it enough to let this be the place where BWS finally comes to rest and to not have it be just the latest "Archer & Armstrong" (tied up in legal technicalities and probably never to see the light of day again) or *Storyteller* (that entirely cold-blooded amputation) (if only Tristan hadn't actually beaten his therapist to death) (if only he hadn't gotten an erection while doing so) I can't think of any lifelong body of such unreservedly brilliant work that has exacted quite so obvious and terrible a psychic toll on its creator. All the sacrifice of blood and spirit and sweat and the frankly-admitted-to tears, the defense of self in a moment of weakness ("I can't go on. I am only human") that in turn becomes a lifelong indictment of self ("only human") and what-might-have-been's.

Like every other artist who bought a copy, I have a Get Out of Jail Free card. I'm free to detach myself from the human toll documented on nearly every page and just make use of the inspiration of the rendering, the colour choices, the composition, the variations, the detail, the mixing and matching of media. It's a Feast and an entirely Moveable one. Page after page after page after page. Even when I try to focus on the narration the illustrations are impossible to ignore. What was it Oscar Wilde said? "To cure the soul with the senses, and the senses with the soul." Nonsensical advice and a recipe for a precipitous fall from grace. Still I can enjoy *Picture of Dorian Gray* for its own sake—The End—and never have to endure or revisit or contemplate the two years of hard labour that it directly led to.

And BWS toils on, framing and attempting to answer the questions he perceives as having been directly posed to him more than thirty years before, paying exorbitant tolls when exorbitant tolls are called for, persevering, gravitating to themes, reworking ideas that existed on a higher plateau in their BWS rough pencil stage than most of us—including Jack Kirby—could ever have hoped to aspire to on our best day…or week…or month. The first "Artemis and Apollo" was quantum levels beyond our grasp and our limited abilities and each successive version only dwarfs that first one. What he considers to be a "dashed off" colour sketch, most artists of my generation would be pleased to consider a finished cover painting..

And still he aspires. Of all the people who passed through the halls of Marvel Comics in the legendary 1960s, he above everyone else warrants that epithet which doubles as the Latin motto of the state of New York:

Excelsior. Ever Upward.

Next issue: OPUS 2

About This Issue's "About Last Issue"

DAVE: So, Craig, do you think Barry will be offended by my observations on *OPUS*?

CRAIG: Perhaps, but if he were, it would surprise me. His presentation of the material in *OPUS* allows for a degree of interpretation to begin with. He himself wasn't sure what to make of various experiences for a time. I'm still not convinced that his first interpretation of his Endless Waves experience isn't the correct one: it was just a dream. A really, really intense dream, but a dream.

DAVE: Well, this is part of the on-going disparity of viewpoints between the two of *us*, as well. In planning the first "Dream" issue, you made it pretty clear that you lumped Cerebus' visions in with Cerebus' dreams. I think it's a matter of personal experience. I've had several of what I would describe as visions—or, perhaps more accurately, "visions"—as opposed to dreams, although nothing even close to what Barry has evidently experienced or which I had Cerebus experience. If you've had both, you definitely know that they aren't the same thing. I'm even uncomfortable with the term "visions," since that has too mystical a tone to it. I'd say that Barry does a pretty good job of describing the exact nature of the experience, the full awareness that what you are seeing is real although it doesn't conform to traditional ideas of reality.

CRAIG: Barry's later interpretation of the Endless Waves wouldn't be the only time he would arrive at extraordinary interpretations (in addition to the hummingbird incident). The "Sleepwalkers on the New York streets" (from *OPUS* 2, actually; page 130) really creeped me out the first time I read it. For the next couple of days I couldn't get a handle on it. What *really* happened? When I returned to my reading, Barry clarified a few pages later and said, well, they weren't actually asleep, but his "overtaxed emotional condition" (p. 137) made them *seem* to be asleep by comparison. Oh, well that's a totally different thing, and not nearly as dramatic or chilling.

I don't think any less of Barry for his interpretations (or, obviously, of his art, which I'm still in awe of). In fact, I love the *OPUS* books in part because I like to get glimpses into the workings of his mind. I don't think he's insane or crazy or mentally unbalanced. He has his interpretations. You have yours. I have mine. A Buddhist would have his own. A Jehovah's Witness would have his own. That's the way it works in this world. Obviously everyone can't be right, and the challenge is trying to discern the truth (plus, backing up a step, trying to discern whether it's even possible to determine the truth in any given circumstance—the foundational epistemological question).

DAVE: See, I think the reason that you saw the "Sleepwalkers on the New York streets" as dramatic or chilling is because it is so far outside of your personal conscious mind experience that your unconscious mind understood more clearly than your conscious mind what was being expressed. That is, you think you're awake but you're actually asleep, and that was a deeply chilling thought to your unconscious mind, which flatters itself that it's always awake and had never before considered that that might not be true. Which in turn chilled your conscious mind, which knows that sometimes it's awake and sometimes it's asleep. The idea that both your conscious and unconscious mind are always asleep and wandering around on a planet where everyone is also always asleep—and it is only the occasional individual for intermittent periods who is actually awake like BWS in the time period he was documenting—that was what you found chilling. The idea that BWS was in a heightened state of extreme wakefulness you consider "a totally different thing and not nearly as dramatic or chilling," but really it's the same thing, but viewed from the "actually awake" side of the fence, and I suspect a very accurate way of looking at our world as constituted. Not only is everyone's conscious mind asleep for however many hours a night, our unconscious minds are asleep 24/7 compared to what they are capable of and compared to how they perceive themselves: as being wide awake 24/7.

In the same sense that I see demonic possession everywhere. I can be talking to someone and suddenly an unclean spirit takes them over and it isn't the person that I'm talking to, it's the unclean spirit. People get very offended at my identifying that, whereas to me, at this point in my life, it's just part of the natural order of things. If you pray five times a day, fast regularly and scrupulously try to get rid of all of your vices, it's really the spiritual equivalent of brushing and flossing your teeth. If you don't brush and floss your teeth, your teeth self-evidently and inescapably erode into a degraded state. But those taken with unclean spirits prefer other explanations (obviously): I suffered childhood trauma or some other psychological

explanation. "My teeth aren't rotten, they're just misunderstood." No, your teeth are rotten because you aren't taking care of them. "How DARE you? How DARE you JUDGE MY TEETH?" I'm not *judging* your teeth, I'm just stating a fact. Here. Look at the x-rays—you can see these dark spots here. "Oh, and I suppose YOUR bloody wonderful teeth DON'T have dark spots?" Well, no, they don't. See I brush them and floss them on a daily basis. "So you're saying YOUR teeth are BETTER than my teeth?" Well, yes. You know those pains you get when you eat something cold? "Oh, NOW you're getting PERSONAL! What BLOODY BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS if I get pains in my teeth when I eat something cold?"

And so on. That isn't a sensible conversation with a person about teeth, it's a conversation with an unclean spirit about teeth.

CRAIG: I wouldn't deny the existence of demonic possession or of the process that prayer, fasting, and virtuous living would allow one to be more perceptive to sensing unclean spirits. But for me this is an entirely different area from discussions of the conscious versus the unconscious mind.

From time to time you say that you think you're all alone in such-and-such a belief. Well, try this: I'm not convinced there even *is* such a thing as an unconscious or subconscious mind, and if there is, we probably can't say anything about it.

It all goes back to a great philosophy teacher I had in college. In one course—probably Phenomenology—he made an off-hand comment that went something like this: "I'm always suspicious of talk about a subconscious mind, because as soon as you talk about it, you're in the area of consciousness and the conscious mind. It's a contradiction to talk about what's going on in the unconscious or subconscious minds. If they're truly *sub*conscious, then we can't know about them."

Wondering if I remembered correctly after all these years, I tracked down the professor, Dabney Townsend (now Professor of Philosophy at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Georgia). He said, "I don't remember saying it, but it certainly sounds like something I would have said, and might still believe today." He suggested that the comment reflected the debate between the phenomenologists (Hegel, Husserl, etc.) and Freud.

If talk of a subconscious mind makes me suspicious, you can imagine what happens when the discussion veers toward the idea of an *awake* unconscious mind versus an *asleep* unconscious mind. (Townsend told me, "It sounds like you're on the right track in being suspicious here.") Seriously, what in the world are we talking about? And once we decide that, how can we possibly say anything informative about it? "Our unconscious minds are asleep 24/7 compared to what they are capable of and compared to how they perceive themselves: as being wide awake 24/7." I'm not claiming that this isn't true. I'm claiming that we have absolutely no way of knowing whether it's true or not if "unconscious mind" has any sort of meaning.

The "Sleepwalkers" incident didn't chill me because "my unconscious mind understood more clearly than my conscious mind" what was being expressed (I'm not even sure what that means, let alone how it could be verified), but because (1) it's a visually unnerving scenario, and (2) I couldn't figure out what actually happened. It *couldn't* have happened exactly as described. Groups of sleepwalkers do not traverse city streets. Was Barry becoming mentally unhinged? I didn't believe that either based on what I'd read in *OPUS*. A friend suggested the beings were demons. For a couple of days I couldn't get the passage out of my head. When I finally returned to reading *OPUS*, Barry seemed to undercut the drama a few pages later by saying he was in a heightened state of awareness during that walk. Whatever this means, the bottom line was that there were *not* groups of sleepwalkers moving down the city streets, except *metaphorically*. It's a great metaphor, but the story loses its horrific edge.

If there *is* such a thing as a heightened state of awareness in the metaphysical sense—and I suspect that there is—wouldn't it coincide with one's becoming closer to God, who (staying with the metaphor) would have to be the "most aware" being, right? It seems axiomatic. But Barry's heightened states don't seem to be leading him in that direction. So something's out of sync—perhaps Barry's or my interpretations, or Barry's or my cosmology. Who knows? Maybe we're *both* way off base.

Getting back to the subconscious: admittedly I'm not anything close to an expert in psychology, which is why I don't outright deny the existence of something called an unconscious mind. My approach is strictly a logical one: if it's really and truly unconscious, then we can't be conscious of it, and if we aren't conscious of it, then we can't talk about it. We can only talk about what we're conscious of (excepting, of course, talking in one's sleep, or other similar phenomena).

Obviously there's some sort of process in which the senses receive input and later spit out a related item: we find ourselves humming a song and halfway through realize that it's the song playing over the store's sound system. We didn't decide ahead of time that we were going to sing that song, we started it and then assume that the store's choice influenced our action. But to jump from this kind of process to an entire construct of an unconscious mind that then gets split into the Id and the Superego (according to Freud), or the personal versus the collective unconscious (according to Jung) seems to be getting way ahead of ourselves.

It doesn't help that all this talk of the unconscious mind seems to lead into areas that I also view with suspicion. It reminds me of your quote in *FC*

10 regarding dreams: "It is an interesting *thesis* that the borderline between the dreaming and the waking world is narrower than we might suspect and that various tricks can be developed to allow for lucid dreaming and efficaciousness of various stripes, but I think all of those sorts of ideas lead in very bad directions...." I won't deny that it can produce great art: my favorite comics artist (BWS) and my second-favorite film director (David Lynch) both believe that their unconscious minds influence their creative endeavors (if I'm understanding them correctly). The worlds they create are fascinating and extraordinary and brilliant. I visit them repeatedly. But I still can't buy into their theories about the unconscious mind.

Sim: "It is only because of my nature as a storyteller and Barry's nature as a storyteller...that we go where angels fear to tread."

The unconscious mind now seems to be the junkpile into which everything gets thrown when we can't explain it logically. A seemingly normal mom goes nuts and drowns her kids? "Well, you know, she repressed her anger deep into her subconscious, and it just finally exploded." Maybe so, but again, prove it to me. Until then, pardon me if I am suspicious.

(I'm also wondering if the unconscious mind is so fluid and undefinable that it prevents the possibility of being *disproved*. It strikes me as the perfect "conspiracy theory" of the mind: the less evidence we have of its existence, the more we can say that it's part of the really, *really* unconscious section of the mind.)

(And if, on the other hand, the evidence is hard and cold and scientific and irrefutable, then I would argue it's part of the *conscious* mind.)

The world doesn't have to make sense and be logical and have everything wrapped up in a nice bow. I'm a big fan of Soren Kierkegaard, and *Fear and Trembling* is one of the five or ten most influential books in my life. But talking about what's going on in the unconscious mind simply doesn't sync up, as far as I can tell.

DAVE: Yes, at which point all I can do is reiterate my point that unless you have experienced it, it is the most natural thing in the world to doubt the existence of the extra-conscious or super-conscious state that Barry experienced and is attempting to relate. Without the experience of an extra-conscious or super-conscious state, the unconscious or subconscious seems not only ridiculously theoretical but self-evidently unnecessary. Why introduce something into the discussion that by its very definition is unknowable? Because the experience of the extra-conscious or super-conscious states brings into very sharp relief that it's all relative. That's what I was trying to say about the sleepwalkers. They were perfectly conscious and aware people in your frames of reference. From an extra-conscious state, they were sleepwalking. Once you experience the extra-conscious state you naturally assume that it is always there, so your conscious mind is aware of your unconscious mind and your unconscious mind is aware of your conscious mind *from then on.* Whereas if you haven't experienced it, there is only your conscious mind, which because it isn't aware of your unconscious mind is actually, relatively, unconscious. Unconscious Aware and Unconscious Unaware.

It is only because of my nature as a storyteller and Barry's nature as a storyteller—or perhaps more accurately—as Feiffer's *The Explainers*—that we go where angels fear to tread. Without the compulsive "Explain" gene, the average person who experiences the extra-conscious state realizes that he or she can't explain it and that everyone will just think that they're crazy, so they just pretend it didn't happen or use alcohol to make themselves forget that it happened because being seen as normal is more important than pursuing and finding and communicating the truth or The Truth. Even though Barry and I know that we will be considered crazy, it's too good a story—all the more so because it's true: it isn't something we made up or dreamt, it's something that actually happened to us. How could you not tell people the story of this extra dimension to human existence that most people don't know about?

Metaphorically, it is another expression of God's existence. How can you prove the existence of something that is un-provable, and why would you even suggest such a thing? Because you experience it and, for certain personality types, it compels you to share it. It's why the title of BWS's series STORYTELLER is so unfortunate. It suggests that BWS is the same as, say, Neil Gaiman or Alan Moore, making things up but not getting attached to any of them. That's why I asked Neil about magic and included the discussion in issue 186. "There's something there." There. Not here. Neil can come up with realities that beggar the imagination, but they're lies. As both he and Alan say, writers are liars. Well, yes, they *can* be. They can choose to plumb their imaginations and indiscriminately just SAY STUFF for the sake of saying stuff and getting paid for it and having people get off on their writing. But, to think that BWS is in the same category is to completely blur the distinction between a lie and the truth. BWS only draws and writes what he knows to be true, as he experienced it. But the grail is always Absolute Truth. For Neil and

Alan, all stories are true.

It's my addition to the mix to suggest that that's exactly the difference between the divine and the infernal. BWS and I may be completely wrong in what we infer, but we infer from experience, and we are concerned both with our experience of reality and Reality and with attempting to communicate it as accurately as possible within our limited human means even if that means we are seen as the lowest form of human life: lunatics.

If Neil or Alan got a really good idea for a jolly great story that would shake the reading population to their booties and have them wrapped around the block to buy it at Barnes and Noble, that would be an inherently good thing. Write it! What could be better? Whereas BWS and I choose to destroy our professional reputations by communicating the truth as closely as we can convey it. I knew that *Latter Days* and *Rick's Story* and *The Last Day* weren't going to be big box office. Exactly the opposite was the likely result. But it was more important to tell the Truest Story I Knew and possibly destroy the franchise in which I had invested a quarter of a century than to just try and find the biggest box office idea I could come up with and graft that on to what I had so far, To just SAY STUFF and hope that *The Last Day* would hit number one on the *New York Times* Best Seller List.

On the contrary, being number one on the *New York Times* Best Seller List is far more likely to mean that you are a liar, because an attractive lie is always going to be more popular than a hard truth.

CRAIG: In the fall of 2004 I had a series of strange experiences that I later referred to (among friends) as an "epiphany." Not the most inventive description, I grant, but accurate (if I understand the term properly), because the experiences—of a spiritual or transcendental or super-natural (in the literal sense) nature—transformed my understanding of the natural world and how humans can, at times, get glimpses of the behind-the-scenes workings of the transcendent world often hidden behind it. My specific experiences weren't anything like Barry's or, I assume, yours, but I believe they allow me at least to understand them conceptually, and to propose the following:

I would not want to pass judgment on anyone's experiences per se, because experiences by themselves do not lead to truth. Instead, they are the raw material that is interpreted by whatever world views we choose to accept. One person's miracle is another person's unusual coincidence. The event itself remains unchanged.

My own "epiphany" did not lead me down paths of the subconscious or the collective unconscious or endless waves of truth or any such thing. Was it because I'd already expressed doubt about the subconscious (for example)? Was my cosmology driving my interpretation of the experiences, or had my previous experiences created a cosmology? Admittedly this might be a tricky chicken-and-egg kind of thing, but I would argue—I won't go in to the long reasoning now, but just get to the bottom line—that at the end of the day, one's world view, chosen for whatever and myriad reasons, creates the template through which we interpret our experiences. It can only happen that way. We may change our world views throughout our lives—and experiences may play a part in this—but ultimately all experiences have to be sifted through this world view and interpreted one way or another. After a certain age—and certainly by the time one can enter into some sort of reflective description of life—no ones comes to experiences with a blank slate (with apologies to John Locke).

And yes, when I tried to describe what I had learned from my epiphany, my true friends thought it was fascinating, and my, eh, "untrue friends" thought that I was crazy and needed to seek professional help. (None of this had to do with the subconscious or truth through experience or anything like that, by the way.)

So of course Barry's sleepwalker story was a metaphor, and a really, really cool metaphor. But for me not as chilling, when read in a house alone late at night, as something like that happening literally.

However, you lost me a bit with the Gaiman/Moore section. They say that writers are liars but all stories are true? I suppose I could connect these two in a convoluted fashion, but how do *you* believe they join the two?

DAVE: I think the point comes down to belief. What you believe and what you choose to believe and—perhaps the larger point—whether you choose belief. It seems to me in your own situation you have chosen not to believe or, rather, to believe that belief is subjective. That's very different from believing that belief is objective. I suspect that if you put it to Barry, he would lump you in with the girlfriend of his who saw the same weird phenomenon that he did but who reacted by closeting herself in her room and refusing to talk about it. Given the choice of choosing to believe her own senses or to not believe her own senses, she chose non-belief: even though it was pretty ridiculous of her to do so when she was obviously still reacting to what she had seen. Why was she closeted in her room and refusing to talk? Because of what she had experienced, ergo, she experienced something.

It's a hall of mirrors effect: choosing to believe to choose to believe in belief. Choosing to believe to believe in choosing to believe in believing in belief. If you have so far divorced yourself from belief it really does become a living example of Lao-Tzu's ancient homily, "A

journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Or you can take another single step in the opposite direction and choose to further disbelieve in belief. You didn't get a thousand miles away from objective reality overnight. It was one step at a time, beginning with your first learning experiences.

"This is what I believe." That's what I write about and everyone calls me crazy. As it says in the Koran, we all came from God and to Him we are returning. God is the point of belief because God is the only reality. You can take a step towards that idea and start moving back towards reality, or you can take a step away from that idea and further separate yourself from reality. But that is the only reality. Everything else that you think exists is just waves/particles flying in loose, temporary formation. If I expressed that as: "Here's a weird idea for a science fiction story that I made up," everyone would believe that I was sane but very imaginative. Because I say what is empirically true: nothing exists except God, I am deemed to be insane. But, so far as I can see, that's just the natural reaction in a world that continues to choose to walk *away* from reality. Someone choosing to walk *towards* reality is deemed to be insane.

Neil and Alan are in the category of people who have chosen to walk away in the other direction. God being the only actual reality, to them, is a story. Saying that God is their wastebasket (or walking away from reality, the wastebasket of a writer they just made up) or a small gaseous being floating in the upper atmosphere of Jupiter, to them, has the same merit as saying that God is the only actual reality. All stores are true.

To me, all they've done is to choose non-belief over belief, first of all and non-belief in reality over belief in reality. That's their fully protected free-will choice, but I think it is self-evidently unwise.

CRAIG: I'm not sure how I could be lumped in with Barry's obstinate girlfriend. I don't disbelieve any experiences—my own or anyone else's. But they're merely raw material to be interpreted. I don't have a clue what "belief is subjective" or "belief is objective" could mean. Belief is simply—belief. But I believe *truth* is objective. *Reality* is objective. I realize this puts me at odds with much current thought, in which I have "my truth" and you have "your truth" and that guy over there has "his truth." If we're talking about inconsequential things—what's the best brand of ice cream—then okay. But if we're talking about foundational principles of reality—time, space, existence, body, mind, spirit, humanity, God, etc.—I believe there is an objective reality. I can't prove it, of course. No one can. No one can prove there is *not* an objective reality. But everyone has to pick a side, based on whatever criteria they decide to use. (Maybe this is what you mean by subjective belief.)

The big question, of course—the core epistemological question—is *whether* we can know this objective reality, and if so, *how*. I believe we can know at least *some* of it.

So you see, if my beliefs, formulated not empirically (they couldn't be) but somehow else (and we won't be able to unpack *that* riddle here), are different from Barry's (or yours or anyone else's), I may very well interpret his "weird phenomenon" differently. That's not the same as shutting myself in a room and ignoring it. It's just coming up with a different explanation.

Perhaps I'm missing something obvious here, but this seems axiomatic. You and Barry both present reality as each of you sees it, but both of you can't be correct about the ultimate nature of reality, because your views conflict. If I then come in with yet a different interpretation, all three of us can't be correct about reality. We could all be wrong, but we can't all be correct.

The experiences themselves are what they are, but what *really* happened—well, that's just one and only one thing.

DAVE: You've been vague here about your own experiences, your own epiphany, as you call it. Have you considered just explaining publicly what it was? Something was communicated to you and instead of building on it, you appear to have tried to pretend it never happened, or that it happened but it wasn't important. It's the Princess and the Pea. The longer something like that goes on, the worse it gets, particularly if it has been intended as a foundational communication. Barry experienced a great deal of relief when he finally admitted what he had experienced and put it down on paper.

CRAIG: I'll give it a shot, though putting it into words is difficult.

In the fall of 2004, a question came to me: What if there were a rhythm to the world, and what if a person could see glimpses of that rhythm and even become a part of it?

There is, of course, no proof that such a rhythm exists, or that we could see it or become a part of it. But virtually every good story excels in both text *and* subtext. *What if* the universe is God's monumental story, and we've been so distracted by the text for so long that we've forgotten how even to look for the subtext? What would happen if we began asking a simple question daily about seemingly mundane events, let alone seemingly important ones: "Does it *mean* anything, and if so, *what*?"

There's a cliché within the arts community (I see it most often applied by filmmakers defending a work that doesn't "make sense" or resolve major storylines or themes): "Life doesn't make sense, so why should art?" It's a seductive argument if one accepts the premise, but what if it's wrong? What if life ultimately *does* make sense, but that we're usu-

ally too blind (i.e. too limited as humans) to understand the big picture? And in fact, most art *does* "make sense" in some fashion: that's why it's considered art as opposed to a random collection of elements—there is the hard work of selection and de-selection. Could this be a clue as to the true workings of the universe? Do we have a compulsion toward meaning because it's part of our psyche, our "psychological DNA," so to speak? Why isn't the better question, "Art makes sense, so why shouldn't life?"

What if we began to ask ourselves, "What is the larger plan?" If God really is orchestrating a rhythm, shouldn't we seek it and seek to know our place in it? Maybe we don't get illumination because we don't even get close to asking the correct questions. Seek and you will find; you do not have because you do not ask; etc.

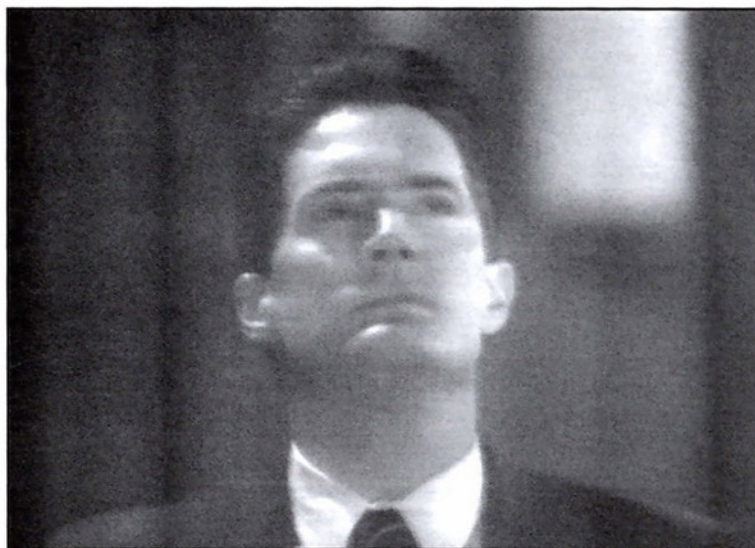
The difficulty is in being spiritually receptive to seeing these rhythms, which will often—if not usually—exhibit themselves in the commonplace, the ordinary. Did we arrive at work fifteen minutes early because of getting lucky and hitting all green lights, or because there was some larger purpose? (This is *not* a rhetorical question. I don't assume the latter. And the answer could change from day to day.) And if the latter, was it because there was someone we were supposed to meet "by chance" that we might otherwise miss—someone who needed a word of encouragement or warning (for example) from us? Or was it because we were supposed to *not* encounter someone we would have run into if we were "on time"? Or was it because we missed being caught in a traffic accident? Or was it because the presence of our car prevented another traffic accident, or some other event? Perhaps we drove by a shop at the precise time a customer happened to look outside. Our red car reminded him that he needed to pick up a dozen roses for his wife; those roses so elated her that it reinvigorated their marriage, and the first domino that would have resulted in a divorce three years down the road never fell.

So many possibilities. Some we could never know, but what if—*what if*—some of them we *could* know, but we don't bother asking, because we don't assume that we can have access to the rhythm of the world?

Part of the difficult balancing act is allowing for a rhythm that we can opt in or out of as individuals, because otherwise you have determinism on one hand and chaos on the other. Is it possible to have *both* free will (and the individual responsibility that implies) *and* a "larger plan"?

Much Oriental philosophy talks about the "harmony of nature." I'm far from the expert in this area, but I always understood it to include the idea that humans were a part of the larger, harmonic natural order and had a specific part to play. It's an appealing notion (I was, and still am, a huge fan of the seventies TV show *Kung Fu*), but empirically problematic (consider the opening of Terrance Malick's brilliant film *The Thin Red Line:* "What's this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself? The land contend with the sea? Is there an avenging power in nature? Not one power, but two?"). But what if we *are* part of a great rhythm, and that we can have greater power in Christ by understanding this rhythm instead of stumbling along hoping that we're a part of it?

Miller: "Why isn't the better question, "Art makes sense, so why shouldn't life?""

The best filmic presentation of this idea that I've ever seen was in an episode of *Twin Peaks* directed by David Lynch (episode 2007 from the unfairly maligned second season). Killer Bob strikes again, but there are no witnesses to the crime. At the exact moment, however, FBI Agent Dale Cooper is at the Roadhouse listening to a live band, and in a vision a Giant appears and says simply, "It is happening again." The Giant disappears, and Cooper senses that something important has happened, but he doesn't know what. There's something in the air, and he's seeking the answer. For apparently no reason people around him connected to the deceased individual begin to sob. An elderly waiter comes over to Cooper's table and says, "I'm so sorry." The episode ends with Cooper looking upward, puzzled but seeking the answer. He knows that what transpired has *meaning*, and he's waiting for the illumination.

Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) from Twin Peaks: *the intersection between a seeker and a transcendent reality*

This scene is close to depicting what I'm trying to describe: the intersection between a seeker and a transcendent reality.

What if it's possible, a la *Dale Cooper, to see "out beyond the edge of the board, at a bigger game"? (Art from* Flight, *p. 226)*

Four episodes later (episode 2011), Cooper is under internal FBI investigation for some missing drugs, and he tells the investigating agents, "I know the moves I'm supposed to make, and I know the board. I've started to focus out beyond the edge of the board, at a bigger game" (chess is a key element in the second season—as it is at one point in *Cerebus*, interestingly). Actor Kyle MacLachlan delivers the lines with a knowing smile, while respecting the seriousness of the charges against him. The investigator's response is a predictable, "What the hell are you talking about?" and recommends "a full psychological work-up" of Cooper.

The important thing is that we can't "will" this spiritual insight upon ourselves. Maybe it *was* just happenstance that got us to work fifteen minutes early. But maybe it was not. How do we know which? Only God knows. *Literally*. Only. God. Knows. Perhaps there are times that He wants us to know which it was. Perhaps we should be asking more often, and then, like Cooper, listening for the answer.

DAVE: Well, yes. I think that puts us on the same page—provided by Christ you mean or can possibly mean the Johannine Jesus. Your "rhythm of the world," which I would go so far as to describe as the "rhythm of the universe," I think is inexplicable in a way that our human, physically incarnated minds can conceive, grasp or be made to understand.

That's what I think is the underlying idea behind the Islamic "submission to the will of God." It doesn't happen by itself, we definitely have to work at it (the larger definition of jihad), particularly just to understand that genuine reality—or as I've described it here, "objective belief"—is very different and much subtler from ostensible reality. That's the conundrum of our existence: that which is inherently false and illusory seems real and solid, while that which is inherently true is ephemeral and can be perceived only intermittently and imperfectly. The trick is to stay as close as possible "in spirit and in truth" to the latter even when we have no conscious awareness of it, often for extended periods of time. It's easy to get discouraged but, after all, Mother Teresa managed it for fifty years without having any further awareness of God's presence in her life after His initial direction to her. That really puts it in perspective. Don't sweat it if you haven't "heard from God" in a few weeks or even a few years. Just stay tuned to the "same frequency" as if you were at a forward base camp in the Arctic, running out of supplies and in the middle of a snowstorm. That's the frequency He's going to contact you on when and if He needs to, so that's the frequency—or "rhythm"—you need to stay aligned with to the best of your abilities.

Cerebus Gallery

Above and following: five commission art pieces from last year

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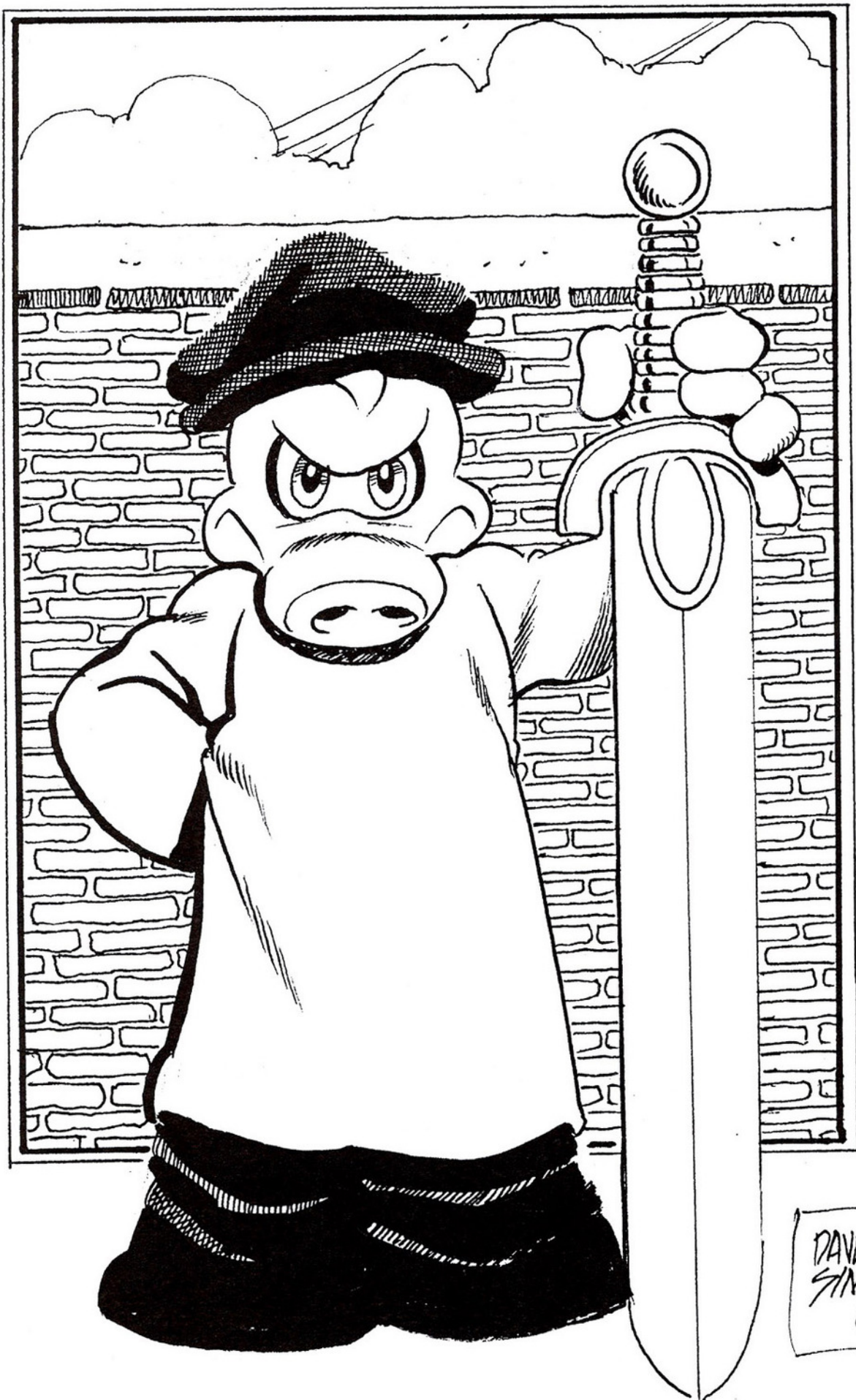
DAVE SIM 06

INEFFECTIVE PAPAL STRATEGIES FOR REBUILDING CHURCH ATTENDANCE

DAVE SIM '06

DAVE SIM '06

Drew at the "Spirits of Independence" stop in Seattle. Photo by Gerhard.

Drew Hayes (Poison Elves)

20 July 1969-21 March 2007

I received a letter from Drew Hayes back in 1990. I think this would make a better obituary than anything else I could think of. He did a drawing of Cerebus and his character on the last page. Some of the guys who are really desperate to get published are apt to take heart from this and, I think, this many years later it makes a funny story.
—Dave Sim

Dave,

It's been six years since I wrote you a letter. This is an occasion. I should say something moving.

It's 11:49 on the west coast, what time is it there?!?

This letter is not an "ohboymaybeit'llgetpublished" letter. In fact, I'm probably going to talk a lot about myself and ask (drill) you a lot of questions.

Oh humble me oh mystic shaman of the independent comic world! I know I come to you a letter from the blue from a total stranger (but not *totally* strange) and you're saying, "Hmph! What do I owe this guy? I'll have Deni send him some short, typed thank you, Dave is a busy guy" letter, or perhaps form letter #3.

Seriously, I don't think or know if you guys do form letters. In fact, I don't know anything after my subscription was cut off (I think around issue #37 of *Cerebus*). I'm sure I'll feel moved to bring it up later.

But for now, I will tell you briefly of myself:

My name is Drew Hayes, and I am 20 years old. I am also an artist.

Let me tell you, you're good. Even in the early issues, you were good. (*Cerebus* is the reference when I say issues. As said earlier, I don't know anymore of Aardvark-Vanaheim since #35, 36, or 37?) and as the series went on you got better fast. Structure, page and story flow, dialogue, wit, it got better.

So I was about, what, 12 or 13, and I drew and drew and drawed constantly saying, "If I can't be better than Dave Sim, I'll be just as good!!"

What I didn't think about was (at the time) that all the time I was getting better, you were too.

So what was I gonna do? Kill myself. No, that's awfully drastic, so I decided to quit stressing and quit trying to copy you, Wrightson (spelled grossly), Pini, Byrne, Barrett (he's a guy that lived down the street), and I said, "Hell, just draw."

So I did. Got into some family trouble when I was 17 and ended up Squatting, drinking, and brawling a lot, and when you're attempting hand to mouth survival, you can't keep up with the comic world too much (my only serious collecting was *Cerebus, Elfquest*, Byrne *X-Men),* and Berni W. *Swamp Things*).

Anyway, life is good now, thank you, and I'm in the middle of a lifelong drawing binge.

And while I don't idolize DAVE SIM anymore (don't worry, I idolize no man), I still think of *Cerebus*, go back to it for inspiration. Dave, you're living off your "hobby." I'm sure

you've thought just that, then chuckled maniacally for hours and hours....

Ever since I've been 12, I've dreamed of it, wanted it. Wanted the satisfactions and rewards, as well as the disappointments and coronaries. I don't have the mind to be a novelist, but I do have the mind to author comic books.

I am not some yokle half assed artist writing you, to ask you to publish it, though I'd be a liar if I'd say my pride is beyond it. I'm writing you to ask you, the one who proved you could do it, the one who planted this determination to do it in a 12 year old kid's brain, unbeknownst to its festering growth throughout the years, I ask you—how?

"Oh shit," exclaims Dave mentally. "This guy doesn't know what he's asking!"

Well, I do.

I'm not asking "how" technical, I'm asking "how" as in after the comic is drawn and copyrighted, how do you get it out of your living room? I have no contacts. If I think about it too hard, I begin to wonder if I'm going to get crushed. Printers. *Distribution!*

The demon of distribution.

So I sit here. I look at the two issues I've done. I'm starting on number three, and I've a solid storyline, evolution of character planned well up to issue #20. I have it copyrighted. I'm ready to go. (Tell you a synopsis in a few.)

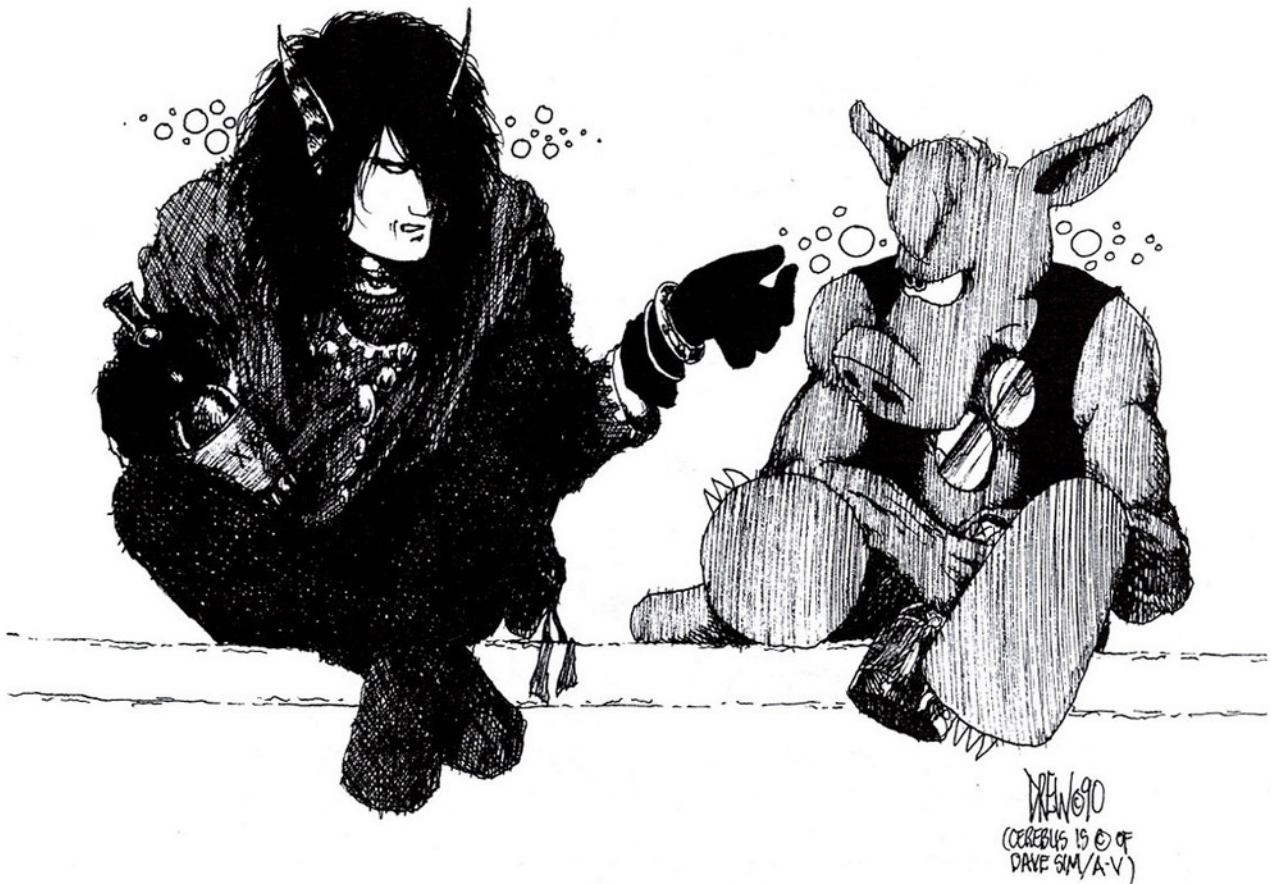
But I know not...how!

If you answer me, I think you will, I do, I'm not going to beg anymore, I'm just at my ends. But if you answer this, do as you see fit. Just say whether to go left or right or say details, I don't care.

Anyway, the book (briefly) is about an elf named Luisiphur. Sort of a mercenary-thief type who is sort of wishy-washy about what he really wants to do, and tries a couple of things, things of ignorance a bit.

Then he gets heisted into a band of assassins and begins to train in the art of assassination (no ninjas!). As the books go on, he ascends over the expectations of his trainers and gets too good. Conspiracy erupts, betrayals, deceptions, complex scams and crux's. I can do this forever.

I am serious as a heart attack, this world and character, political systems (the elf's name is Luisiphur (Louis-if-urr) by the way)—all of it developing through the years.

I'd like to send you xeroxes of issue #1 to get your opinion, but I'm chancing response with this letter. It's rough, it is. But most issue #1s

are.

Now, before I depart, I need more answers to different questions.

Three issues into my subscription. Three issues, I no longer had to plod through Spokane winters, with my two dollars clenched frozen in my then frostbitten hand, to downtown to a seedy little comic store—the only place in Spokane that sold *Cerebus*, just to *ask* if the newest issue came in. Days of freezing (or baking) were over!

#36 came. A month went, #37? #37? Another month. #37? Three months—four!

Dave Sim hates me! *Dave Sim hates me and I hate him!*

Very confusing, being 12, 13, whatever I was at the time! Anyway, fits of childish rage.

I had issue #3-#3?.

I couldn't look at them.

I was anti-social.

The cramps couldn't cheer me up.

I—sob—*sold them.*

*"You idiot!" I scream now, "you stupid f**king idiot!"*

I went through several phases. I hated life. I hated *Cerebus*. I hated myself. I hated my best friend knighting me "Sir Andrew the Dolt" for it.

All in all, not a cerebral move. Emotional. See, I cared not of money, but in a way, *Cerebus* reminds me of being a—sniff—kid. I don't want to get too hoaky, but it does.

All I remember now is prominent characters (i.e. Elrod, Red Sophia, Lord Julius, the Elf) and a bit of "mind games" and your *Beguiled* parody.

Despite the loss (it is a loss, man, you gave this kid a reason to live for a while), I've since learned the general circumstances and before that long ago decided that you were too good to me (inadvertently, of course) to bear a grudge against.

So!

To apologize for all the curses I vext on you, the anger/sorrow, and the voodoo doll (Joke, man, joke!). I'm sending you a drawing of Luisiphur and your brainearth-pig.

Thanks for your time.

Drew Hayes
Bellingham, WA

WELL, I DO.
I'M NOT ASKING "HOW" TECHNICAL, I'M ASKING "HOW" AS IN AFTER THE COMIC IS DRAWN AND COPYRIGHTED, HOW DO YOU GET IT OUT OF YOUR LIVINGROOM? I HAVE NO CONTACTS. IF I THINK ABOUT IT TOO HARD, I BEGIN TO WONDER IF I'M GOING TO GET CRUSHED. PRINTERS.' **DISTRIBUTION!**

THE DEMON OF DISTRIBUTION.
SO I SIT HERE. I LOOK AT THE TWO ISSUES I'VE DONE. I'M STARTING ON NUMBER THREE AND I'VE A SOLID STORYLINE, EVOLUTION OF CHARACTER PLANNED WELL UP TO ISSUE #20. I HAVE IT COPYRIGHTED. I'M READY TO GO. (TELL YOU A SYNOPSIS IN A FEW).
BUT I KNOW NOT .... HOW!
IF YOU ANSWER ME, I THINK YOU WILL, I DO, I'M NOT GOING TO BEG ANYMORE, I'M JUST AT MY ENDS. BUT IF YOU ANSWER THIS, DO AS YOU SEE FIT. JUST SAY WHETHER TO GO LEFT OR RIGHT OR SAY DETAILS, I DONT CARE.
ANYWAY, THE BOOK (BRIEFLY) IS ABOUT AN ELF NAMED LUISIPHUR. SORT OF A MERCENARY-THIEF TYPE WHO IS SORT OF WISHY-WASHY ABOUT WHAT HE REALLY WANTS TO DO, AND TRIES A COUPLE OF THINGS, THINGS OF IGNORANCE A BIT.
THEN HE GETS HEISTED INTO A BAND OF ASSASSINS AND BEGINGS TO TRAIN IN THE ART OF ASSASSINATION (NO NINJAS!). AS THE BOOKS GO ON, HE ACENDS OVER THE EXPECTATIONS OF HIS TRAINERS, AND GETS TOO GOOD.... CONSPIRICY EURUPTS, BETRAYALS, DECEPTIONS, COMPLEX SCAMS AND CRUX'S. I CAN DO THIS FOREVER.
I AM SERIOUS AS A HEART ATTACK, THIS WORLD AND CHARACTER, POLITICAL SYSTEMS (THE ELF'S NAME IS LUISIPHUR (LUISIPHUR - LOUIS-IF-UUR) BY THE WAY) - ALL OF IT

Drew had very distinctive handwriting

Mind Games

Write to us at:
Following Cerebus
2904 Gene Lane
Arlington, TX 76010

e-mail:
editors@followingcerebus.com

Dear Dave,

As you discovered when I wrote a letter in support of the Dave Sim archive, I am a mathematician.

Neal Adams is a wonderful artist, and a hell of a nice guy. I really enjoyed *Following Cerebus* #9, especially the part about Niagara Falls.

But I would like you to imagine somebody, let's say he's a famous mathematician, who comes up to Neal Adams and starts to lecture him on art. This guy has never drawn a picture in his life, he doesn't even know how to hold a pen, but he's very smart and he has read a lot of books about drawing comics. He's picked up all the jargon. So he figures he can tell Neal Adams all the things Neal Adams is doing wrong. Now, let's say Neal Adams gives this mathematician a polite brush off and goes on about his business. The mathematician goes back and tells all his mathematician friends what a totally close-minded person Neal Adams is. These artist, he says, they've been doing things the same way for a hundred and fifty years. They won't listen to any new ideas. Besides, the inkers never talk to the pencilers and the pencilers never talk to the letterers. If they did, they would realize how totally wrong they are and would accept my brilliant theories on how a comic book should be drawn.

I'm sorry to say it, but that's what Neal Adams sounds like when he talks about science. He's read a lot about science. But he's never actually done any science. Even so, he has these wonderful theories about how science ought to be done. But the hidebound old fogies just won't listen.

I'll just mention one thing you and Neal Adams don't seem to know about the working scientist. You wrote, "Somewhere in the history of the Twentieth Century we had lost the idea that being well-informed meant having a more-than-cursory awareness of the bedrock realities of the various sciences and this was as true for scientists as it was for non-scientists." This is like my hypothetical mathematician telling an artist "Somewhere in the history of the Twentieth Century we had lost the idea that being an artist meant having a more-than-cursory awareness of all the aspects of drawing, learning both penciling and inking."

Every really good scientist must be aware of the bedrock realities of all the sciences before he is ever allowed to specialize. And everything that every scientist does must take into account all of the known facts of all of the other sciences.

The kind of thinking that Neal Adams so obviously relishes is reasoning by analogy and common sense. This kind of reasoning can be used to support absolutely anything. It is not science. There is, as far as I know, only one way of putting a theory like Neal Adams's to the test, and Neal Adams rejects putting his theory to that kind of test, twice!

The ancient Romans believed that you could determine the favor of the gods by watching chickens peck corn. Not just ignorant peasants believed this. The wisest, most intelligent, best-informed Romans believed. They had tons of evidence, eyewitness reports of hundreds of cases where the will of the gods was ignored and the Roman army suffered defeat and where the will of the gods predicted victory and the Roman army went on to victory. You can hardly argue with their success. Have I convinced you that pecking chickens show the favor of the gods?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the best read, wisest, and most intelligent people of his day. He believed in fairies. No amount of argument or evidence could shake that belief. Do you believe in fairies?

Today there is more mumbo jumbo in the world than ever before. Most people in the USA believe that the earth is only a few thousand of years old and are comfortable and confident in that belief, though they couldn't tell you the difference between a fairy and a quark.

I am lucky enough to work in a field where I know how to tell the fairies from the quarks. What makes the difference is measurement and experiment. All real scientists know mathematics and use it. But Neal Adams has no use for what he calls "algebra." He says so twice. That means there is no way to put his reasoning by analogy to the test, which means he will probably go on believing his theories for the rest of his life.

Aristotle was a pretty bright boy, too. Reasoning by analogy, he came up with the theory that heavy objects fall faster than light objects. People believed that theory for more than a thousand years. Then Galileo came along, and he had a theory. He said that, except for air resistance, heavier objects do not fall faster than light objects. Two beautiful theories that we could argue about until the cows came home, and I assure you that for every argument you put forth in favor of one, I could come up with an argument in favor of the other.

The only way to settle the issue is by measurement and experiment, using mathematics. Galileo didn't just say objects fall kind of like rocks and kind of like feathers. What he said (translating into

modern units of measurement) is that falling objects near the surface of the earth accelerate downward at 9.8 meters per second per second. Not 9.7 and not 9.9. Now that's something you can actually test.

Contrary to what Neal Adams evidently believes, scientist understand not just that continents (more properly tectonic plates) move. They understand the forces that cause them to move and the rate at which they move. They work out densities and pressures, not by vague analogy but by accurate measurement. Geologists compare the rocks of lands that were once adjacent. Biologists compare the living creatures of lands that were once adjacent. All of the sciences, not just geology, are brought into play. All of the evidence is examined, not just the evidence in favor of a theory but also the evidence against. If the evidence from all the sciences did not agree, the theory would be rejected. In fact, the theory of continental drift was rejected for many years, until the evidence in its favor, the mathematical and scientific evidence, became overwhelming.

If Neal Adams wants his theory to be taken seriously, he needs to be able to answer specific questions, not just put forth vague generalities. At what rate is matter created? At what rate is the earth expanding? How strong are his electromagnetic fields? But he dismisses all that as "algebra." Which is like my hypothetical mathematician dismissing the need to know the difference between a pen and a brush before giving advice to an artist.

Scientists, and on occasion even a mathematician, get letters all the time from people with theories much like Neal Adams' theory. If you would like to read a few, I recommend the book "Perfectly Reasonable Deviations From The Beaten Track: The Letters of Richard P. Feynman."

But Neal Adams is still a nice guy. And a great artist.

Best,
Rick Norwood
Comics Revue

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